

Power for Planting

Series: "Living in the Power of God"

Sermon 4: "Power for Planting"

Scripture: Acts 18:1-11

Pastor J.J. James

We are in the book of Acts exploring what it means to live in the power of God. Paul is now on his second missionary journey. He left Athens Greece and then he went to place called Corinth. We are going to talk today about what happened to Paul while he was there.

Would you turn with me to Acts 18:1-11?

"After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² 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. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ But when 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."

⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titus Justus, a worshiper of God. 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.

⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." ¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God."

There are three words that we can use to describe the city of Corinth. These three words are very easy to remember because they all begin with the letter "C". Corinth begins with the letter "C" and the three words that describe Corinth begin with the letter "C".

The first word that describes the city of Corinth was this.

The city of Corinth was a cosmopolitan city

What made Corinth a cosmopolitan city? First of all, it was huge. It had a population of about 650,000 people. Not only that, the city contained a mixture of people and races. There were different cultures. There were different philosophies. There were different belief systems. It was said that you could find someone on every street corner that had his or her own solutions to all the world's problems. In Corinth there was a great interest in

Greek philosophy and admiration of Greek gods. In fact, they even erected these huge temples throughout the city and dedicated them to these Greek gods.

The city of Corinth was also a commercial city.

It was on a narrow strip of land between two seaports. On the north side they had the Aegean Sea. On the south side they had the Adriatic Sea. In ancient times, sea voyages were hazardous. So it was common for ships to dock at Corinth on the Adriatic side and then they would have their cargo unloaded and carried to the other side of town where it would be loaded back onto the ships. Later on, they put a canal through there and that canal is still there today. Its location made Corinth a major center of commerce. So the city was filled with travelers and traders. That also made Corinth a very wealthy city and very materialistic.

The city of Corinth was also a corrupt city.

They had a phrase in the area that described people who were immoral. If you weren't from Corinth and you wanted to insult someone you would call them "A Corinthian" or say "That person is Corinthianized!" That's how they described people who were drunkards, gamblers, prostitutes or thieves. There was horrible corruption all through the city.

There was a temple in the middle of town that was dedicated to the Greek goddess Aphrodite. Aphrodite was the goddess of love. At one time this temple was considered to be one of the architectural wonders of the world. The temple had thousands of prostitutes who did business with sailors and other commercial people who passed through town. So if you weren't from Corinth and someone said that you were "Corinthianized" it was usually meant as an insult.

You wouldn't have expected for many people to open their hearts and lives to Jesus in the city of Corinth. In fact, most people would have said, "Forget about Corinth. Corinth is a lost cause." But

Paul never thought that Corinth was a lost cause.

When he looked at Corinth, he saw endless opportunities to share the hope and love of Jesus Christ. I want to let you know this morning that no one is a hopeless cause. There is no community that is too corrupt. There is no family problem that is too complicated. There is no heart that is too calloused to be changed by the power of God's love.

Yes, the city of Corinth was a mess. No one would have blamed Paul for giving up on that city. No one would have blamed him for packing it in. Besides that, everything was going against Paul when he first arrived in Corinth. He was all alone and many in Corinth rejected him. He could have looked at the situation and said, "Things are just not going in the right direction."

The good news about Corinth is that there *was* fruit in what Paul said and did. Sometimes we don't get to see the fruit of our actions. We plant seeds that don't yet grow because the soil that we are planting in is not quite ready. But then God steps in and He reminds us that sharing His goodness and love is not about us; it's all about Him. So the Lord speaks to Paul in a vision and says,

"Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." (Acts 18:9b-10)

If you're ever in a place where you're left wondering, "Where is God in all of this?" then hear the words that God says to Paul. "Do not be afraid. I am right there with you. Just keep on sharing my hope and love."

God gives us opportunities to plant His seeds of hope and love.

Sometimes it's in the form of kindness and generosity. You keep sharing and caring until someone's heart becomes more receptive to Him. Sometimes you have to trust that God has someone else in mind to share His love with someone who you care about. Did you notice that Paul did not go to the Temple of Aphrodite? However, that doesn't mean that God wasn't already there. The Bible tells us that God wants ALL people to come to faith in Him. That means that God's Holy Spirit will never stop tilling the soil that is inside the heart of a man. Granted, sometimes it takes longer for the soil to be ready, but rest assured that God's Spirit is always going on ahead.

In our passage we see that God sent Paul to the place where hearts were more receptive. He sent Paul to the people next door. Titus already believed in God. A lot of people believe in God. They just need someone to point them to the Savior.

There is something else about our passage that, to me, just makes sense. (Sometimes I don't make sense, but to me, this one does make sense.) I'm reading between lines a little but I think you might agree with my assumption. My assumption is that Paul was able to share Christ with Titus *after* they became friends. Why else would Titus allow Paul to set up a church in his house and hold worship services? Titus first opened his heart and home to Paul's friendship and then he gave his life to Jesus Christ.

People are often more receptive when they hear about Jesus from a friend.

Paul and Titus were friends. We don't know when or how they became friends. What is fascinating is there isn't any reason to believe that these two men ever had anything in common to cause them to become friends. Titus was a Greek and Paul was from Jewish origin. But God brought them together and gave them a connection to build off of.

Titus came to know Jesus Christ as Paul lived out his faith in front of him. Passages of scripture like this one remind us that it is good to build friendships with people who don't yet know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Those connections are made at

church. They are made at work. They are made at the gym. They are made at the coffee shop. They are made at school. They are made in business. It's good to make connections with people who need Him. Then, over time, God gives us what we need to keep planting His seed of hope and love.

Sometimes seeds must be planted over long periods of time to eventually take root in hearts and lives.

God's love never gives up believing that God can truly reach into the heart of your friend. That's what gives you the desire that you need to keep on sharing God's hope and love with others. Christians sometimes falsely believe that leading others to Jesus takes some kind of formula. The problem is that our efforts to lead others to Jesus don't always pan out the way that we had hoped for and prayed. I've known people who have carried a massive amount of guilt because what they said and did had no effect on their loved one or friend.

That's the reason why God spoke to Paul in a vision. He told Paul to not be afraid and to keep on speaking the truth of God's love. Why do you think Paul needed to hear those words? It wasn't to bolster his desire to share the good news about God's grace and love. He lived to share the good news of God's grace and love.

What God was telling him is that the job of planting the seeds of God's hope and love is something that happens over time. That's why Paul was going to have to be in it for the long haul. He was going to have to take time to build the friendships with people that God wanted him to have. Up until this point, Paul wasn't having a very good experience in Corinth. Paul had been extremely mistreated. But Paul could not use that as an excuse to quit building the bridge. The past did not excuse him from his responsibility to plant God's seeds of hope and love.

Most Christians I know want their family and friends to also have faith in Him. Maybe you had a bad experience when you tried to say something about God's grace to someone that you love. I want to invite you this morning to surrender past guilt and doubt on the altar of prayer. Heart transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. He can do it through His power and in His time. What we can do is pray for our loved ones and friends. Ask God to give you the seeds of hope and love that they need. Then trust in God's power to give you what you need to keep planting His seeds of hope and love.