

Sermon - Acts 18.1-23

Outline of narrative:

vv.1-4

Athens -> Corinth SLIDES 1 & 2

- Capital
- Business – commercial – trade centre
- Isthmian games - biennial
- Aquila and Priscilla (Xians from Rome, Acts 2.10, Claudius 49AD, Seutonius)
- Tentmaking (witness) and synagogue SLIDE 3

vv.5-6

Synagogue only

- Arrival of Silas and Timothy allowed him to cease tentmaking

vv.7-8

House church.

- Done all he could at synagogue and now too hostile to serve as base for mission
- Doesn't move far – next door! Large house.

vv.9-11

Vision

- Maybe thinking time to move on. Not above fear and trembling: 1 Cor 2.1-3
- Stay! Protection from harm (not attack) promised.

vv.12-17

Tribunal

- Ambiguity/intentions of Jews: label Christianity a new (=> illicit) religion
- Gallio's ruling critical
- Poor Sosthenes – takes one for the team!
- Gallio no friend, but unwitting ally

vv.18-23

Departure for Jerusalem, Antioch and Galatia

- Leaves Ephesus to reach Jerusalem for Passover
- Nazirite vow, last cut at Cenchræ. Thanksgiving
- Jerusalem + Antioch (a year?)
- 3rd journey begins

What do we learn from Paul's missionary methods?

Peripatetic

- Moved around, setting up churches (Luke 9) – as the Spirit led/guided
- Aquila and Priscilla also – Rome-Corinth-Ephesus-Rome

Persuasive

- Reason, testimony to the Scriptures and own experience, creation and idolatry. No mention of any signs/wonders.

Pugnacious

- Won't accept patronage
- Won't be put off by persecution; persists until no point in persisting further
- Role of Watchman Ezek 33

Pragmatic

- Goes to places of greatest missionary opportunity (major cities)
- Connects with Jewish believers and guild members. Happy to work with whoever a suitable partner, rich or poor.
- Exploits every opportunity: as leatherworker can witness to the lowly and those in market place (1 Thess 2.9; 1 Cor 4.10-12)
- Bivocational to full-time, self-supporting to supported
- Connects with locals according to context: Athens = creation + philosophy; Jews = Jesus is the messiah. We need to do likewise.

Pneumatic – superintended by the HS

- Presence of Aquila and Priscilla (Claudius an unwitting agent)
- Prophetic watchman role
- Vision and protection – Wall quotation There is no mission in Acts without suffering (18.9), nor one that is not superintended by a provident Sovereign (18.10).
- Significance of Gallio's act

Pious

- Guards own spirituality, drawing on best of tradition
 - Stays connected to Church in Jerusalem, and sending church Antioch
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Michael's own exegesis of this passage, by way of background/additional info.

Peripatetic

"from Athens... to Corinth" – done that, and not as straightforward as v.1 indicates!

Athens= intellectual capital

Corinth = commercial capital

Pragmatic

Strategic importance of Corinth, the capital of Acaia, esp. for trade. Stott: It commanded the trade route in all directions.

Before the Corinthian Canal was dug (end of 19th C), there was a 5.5km slipway by which cargoes and even small vessels were hauled saving over 300km of perilous sea voyage.

"found a Jew named Aquila... with his wife Priscilla", ex Rome, tentmakers. Presumably already Christians before met Paul (cf. Acts 2.10).

Dunn: A & P probably ran a substantial business and were well to do. They moved around freely; they are located in turn in Corinth, Ephesus (18.26) and Rome (Rom 16.3). And their houses were large enough to host the local churches (1 Cor 16.19; Rom 16.5).

Seutonius records, in his *Life of Claudius*, "as the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he banished them from Rome." => is Christian Jews referred to.

Same trade. Connections: race, religion (intro to local synagogue), occupation/trade.

Able to support himself, and wait for Silas and Timothy to arrive. His working at his trade didn't mean he only evangelised on Sabbath at synagogue:

For you remember, brothers, our labour 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. 1 Thess 2.9

Reason Paul worked with hands was:

- Not to be a burden on the churches
- To make himself immune from any charge of ulterior motives in preaching, i.e. profiting from it by peddling it, and to avoid the need for a patron (with those strings attached)
- To be able to reach both visitors to Isthmian games and the poor and lowly – see 1 Cor 1.26 (most of converts not wealthy/noble)

BUT, most places Paul visited his visit was too short to set up in trade. The evidence we have suggests only in Thessalonica (1 Thess 2.9), Corinth (Acts 18.3; 1 Cor 9.12), and probably Ephesus (Acts 20.33-34) that Paul worked to support himself.

In Corinth, every 2 years = the Isthmian games. Attracted huge number of visitors, who would have needed tents!

Also, in Roman and Greek eyes, though not Jewish, working with hands = menial and of low status. So Paul deliberately humbling himself, and – in doing so - made himself to be acceptable to others of lowly status. See 1 Cor 4.10-12 “We are fools for Christ’s sake... To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labour, working with our own hands... We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things”; 1 Cor 9.22 “to the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel.

Persuasive and persistent

Worked week-days, “reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath... tried to persuade Jews and Greeks...

When Silas and Timothy arrived... occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus”

NB. Jews were expecting a Messiah, so starts there. A different starting point with Greeks, as seen in ch.17.

Pragmatic

“When they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments... From now on I will go to the Gentiles.

Allusion to Ezek 33.1-7 esp. v.3. Like Ezekiel, he has performed the task of the watchman.

Repeat of 13.44-47 where Paul said to Antiochenes “you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life”

NB. Wherever he'd been, there were those

- who were vehemently opposed ("jealous" 13.45;17.5)
- who were genuinely open to reason/exploration ("more noble" 17.11)
- who readily believed.

Peripatetic and pragmatic

Moved from Prisca and Aquila's house to Titius Justus' house (a Greek God-fearer), next door to the synagogue. In terms of preaching base, hasn't gone far!

BUT = significant as now a house-church based movement, though still regarded as a sect within Judaism.

With the move from Priscilla and Aquila's house, and the arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia, seems that Paul was able to stop tentmaking to focus solely on preaching, - see 2 Cor 11.9

And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need.

Bivocationalism has its merits, but in the end, and as the church grows, Paul's preference to devote himself full-time to the mission is clear. The church needs to learn from this. Bivocationalism may solve early and immediate problems, but it is not the ideal.

Persuasive

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his whole household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul, (presumably Jew and Greek), believed in the Lord and were baptized." BUT, NB. Paul himself baptized only Crispus and Gaius (1 Cor 1.14)

Pugnacious

The Lord speaks to Paul in a vision – "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."

- Is Paul thinking of moving on, in spite of successes, as he had had to do in Thessalonica and Berea, and the Galatian churches?
- Surely this is a specific prophecy on the eve of the "united attack on Paul" in vv. 12-17, to ensure he completes this extended (18 months – 2 years) mission in Corinth.

NB. refers to God's/my people (rather than Paul's followers).

NB. Paul writes later of how he first came to Corinth to preach the Gospel “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (1 Cor 2.1-3).

NB. The Lord doesn't say to Paul he wouldn't be attacked, only that he wouldn't be harmed in Corinth.

Paul remains there for 18 months “teaching the word of God among them”.

NB. Not the written word as we know it, apart from OT, but the Gospel of JC, and how Jesus fulfils OT and was the Christ (so too v.28).

The united attack: presumably the Jewish religious leaders with others under their influence.

Doubtless motivated by jealousy – of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles believing in Christ.

The charge before the Roman tribunal: Paul “is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.” Roman or Jewish law? Gallio interprets it as the latter – “your own law”.

But Jews presumably wanted him to understand that, while the practice of Judaism was tolerated (though not sanctioned) under Roman law (because neither morally repugnant nor – at least outside of Palestine - politically threatening), Paul's religion wasn't Judaism and so therefore constituted a new and illegal sect. What made Judaism most worthy of consideration to Rome was its antiquity, not its Jewishness. If Christianity could be shown to be a different, new religion, it would be in trouble.

Gallio dismissed this suggestion, ruling (rightly) that worship of Jesus as Messiah fell within the religion of Judaism.

This = v. imp for the future preaching of the Gospel.

They (presumably the hostile Jews) take out their anger on Sosthenes, who presumably has taken over from Crispus as the ruler of the synagogue. cf. 1 Cor 1.1

Even though their beating of Sosthenes was carried out in front of the tribunal, Gallio paid no attention, true to his verdict that not his concern but theirs.

Willimon: “Even the newest convert is vulnerable to the same persecution which afflicts the eldest apostles themselves.”

NB. Roman hatred or at best disinterest in Jews clear in vv.2 and 17.

Nevertheless, the promise of the lord to Paul is fulfilled.

Paul stayed “many days longer” after this. Gallio’s verdict and the move from synagogue to house church seems to have ensured a measure of peace.

Peripatetic

Set sail for Syria, with Priscilla and Aquila (note reverse order).

Pragmatic

At Cenchreae (just south of Corinth) had cut his hair, as under a vow.

Dunn suggests this was the final cut before the vow took effect, the next cut coming at the end, in Jerusalem, when the hair burnt as an offering.

Not something now required to do (as not under the law), but chose to do, and perhaps made him more readily accepted in synagogue at Ephesus (see 1 Cor 9.20.)

Most likely an act of offering of thanksgiving to the Lord who had protected him while in Corinth.

In any case, Paul stresses his/Christianity’s continuity with Judaism.

May well have been another gesture of reconciliation with Jerusalem/Judaizing Jews (cf. circumcision of Timothy in 16.3)

Persuasive

Left P & A and went into synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Pragmatic

BUT declined their invitation to stay for a longer time, saying “I will return to you if God wills”.

Most likely reason was that wanted to reach Jerusalem for Passover (early April in AD 52, in late March in AD53), and sailing season didn’t start till early March. So virtually no leeway.

Peripatetic

Set sail for Caesarea and “goes up [to Jerusalem] to greet the church

Then “down to Antioch.”

Off to Galatia and Phrygia (tour of some 2,400km if ends in Ephesus!), “from one place to the next”, “strengthening all the disciples.”

Wall: There is no mission in Acts without suffering (18.9), nor one that is not superintended by a provident Sovereign (18.10).