

**The Commencement of Ministry in Corinth  
Acts 18:1-4**

This morning's message is in Acts 18:1-4. So, it's a few words here, but there's a lot to learn. Paul wrote, excuse me, Paul is in Athens headed to Corinth, and these words are written by Luke, "After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." That's our passage this morning.

And if you were here three weeks ago, you probably are familiar with Ben Davis. Ben Davis is crossing the United States. Cody told us about him. He's made it now to Indiana, if you're keeping track with him. I'm keeping track of another guy. I'm keeping track of the apostle Paul who's now on his second missionary journey. And he has traveled quite a ways, 1500 miles. If you start in Antioch of Syria where he began, by the time we get to Acts chapter 18, we've now traveled with Paul, 1500 miles, to Corinth. So, there's this area that he has covered by foot. He didn't have a cell phone, probably didn't have the newest version of Nike's or Asics that he's walking in. He didn't even have the nicest people that he would encounter either.

He started in Antioch, north of Jerusalem, made his way to Lystra and Derbe. When he was first at Lystra and Derbe, remember, the reason he's on the second missionary journey in the first place is because he's attempting to visit, with Silas, the churches that were established during the first missionary journey. This included the church in Lystra, and the church in Derbe. Unfortunately, the first time he was there, he was stoned and nearly killed, but he went back again to check on the believers that were gathering there. And then he traveled along to other places in the Near East. He ended up at Troas where he had a vision of the man from Macedonia saying come, and so that moved him across the Aegean Sea. He picked up Luke along the way, picked up Timothy in Lystra, so when they crossed the Aegean Sea, he's got three others; Silas who he started with; Timothy who he picked up at Lystra; and now Luke. And they were arriving at Philippi, so quite a distance, but in Philippi, they ended up being opposed by the Jews. A mob

rose up, and attacked them. They were beaten. Paul and Silas were thrown into prison in Philippi. After an earthquake released them, they fled to Thessalonica. In Thessalonica, they were also opposed by Jews who chased them to Berea. They planted a church in Philippi and Thessalonica, and then, in fleeing to Berea, they found a receptivity there with the Bereans. They were very eager to consider the word of God there. But, unfortunately, the Thessalonians, Jews who were opposing them, chased them down in Berea and they had to flee Berea.

So, Paul moves to Athens, and they were particularly after Paul, so Paul arrives in Athens by himself now, having left Luke behind at Berea, having left Timothy and Silas behind in Berea. Paul is now in Athens, and he heads across to Corinth, right to the west. So, that's where we are. Corinth is a town at an isthmus between two land masses; so, Corinth was a thoroughfare. If you were going to go from the Aegean to the Adriatic Sea, there's a waterway that you could take that was split by this isthmus which Corinth was on, so you would cross... if you didn't want to travel around the southern end of Achaia, Greece, then you would move your boat. They would take your boat on rollers about the three miles to cover the distance to cross into the other sea that way. So, Corinth was an important location because of its ability to be a shortcut of the travelers. It also was a significant place for Christianity because there'd be a church built there, and we see two letters that Paul wrote, his more lengthy letters to the Corinthians. So, we'll be spending most of chapter 18 studying with Paul's ministry in Corinth. So, that's where we've been, not an easy travel to Corinth, not always the best circumstances, but Paul has now arrived at Corinth.

And when you look at his movement to Corinth, it's different than every place we just went. When we said he went here, he went there, he went there, every other place, he was either encountering opposition and fleeing, or he was directed by God's Spirit to go; as we saw with the vision of the man from Macedonia saying come to Macedonia, and that's how he ended up in Philippi. So, with Athens, he left Athens after preaching to this group of city officials at the Areopagus, and they were going to basically consider his future in Athens, and unlike other places Athens, was more open to hearing various ideas. They had a lot of philosophers and people discussing ideas but the people of Athens' response was to some degree mocking, in other degree, apathy. Well, we'll hear more from you, but it wasn't in a sense of wanting to learn, but it was more in the sense of we'll consider this

more but not a receptivity. So, when we move to Corinth, this is a choice that Paul makes. Unlike previous locations, Paul left Athens, not fleeing anybody, just trying to get out, but he traveled fifty miles west of Corinth for greater ministry opportunities.

And there would be more greater ministry opportunities in Corinth than there would be in Athens simply because of the size of Corinth. That's one reason. Corinth was ten times at least, maybe, even twenty times the size of Athens, Corinth was... estimates range 200,000 people which was a lot of people back then in a city, even higher than that - and was a thoroughfare for people, so people were coming and going there. Corinth, also, was very well known for its immorality. There was a lot of prostitution. You could kind of look at Corinth as, maybe, the way we would look at Las Vegas, except, maybe, worse. And so, it had a stigma. It was even a word, to Corinthianize, was the way people would refer to people that had fallen into immorality, so Corinth was well known for this.

So, why would Paul choose to go to this place? It's obvious that Paul is not looking to flee people that were immoral and evil, and so, we had the idol worshipers in Athens that he went to them. He's got the immoral people of Corinth, and he goes to them. Well, there's something to be considered, then. I think, in our Christian life, our goal should not be to get away from every person that's not holy that we can find. As soon as we run into somebody, we shouldn't say, oh, we don't want to be anywhere near you. Quite the opposite, we should look to engage them for the sake of Christ the same way that Paul did. And that he would do that for quite some time. He would stay in Corinth, we learn in Acts 18:11, for eighteen months he would stay there. He wouldn't just, like, to do a hit and run. He, actually, lived there for a year and a half, and when he was there, we see him writing the book, the two epistles to the Thessalonians because he cared about the church that he had established in Thessalonica and didn't leave Corinth to go visit them. He wrote them two epistles which we have today.

So, in Corinth, he encounters a fellow, a certain Jew named Aquila. And we find this person with his wife Priscilla, and they had come to Corinth because of the persecution of Claudius that had caused them to leave Rome - lot of persecutions. So, he joins with Aquila in his occupation of a tentmaker. It's apparent that Aquila and Priscilla had become followers of Christ, not in Corinth, because we don't see a conversion account here. They

seem to quickly join in ministry together without that. Most people consider that this happened in Rome that they were converted in Rome. I kind of have to consider why the phrase that Aquila was "...a native of Pontus..." was included in this account. When you see things in the Bible, they aren't just kind of thrown in there just for factoids to play Bible trivia with. They're for purposes to help us see things, and I think Pontus is probably included because that's where Aquila became a follower of Christ in the first place, and the reason I think that points to that is where Luke included Pontus in another place.

And Pontus - just to kind of orient you - Pontus is nowhere near Acacia, nowhere near Corinth. It's north of Galatia, so, when Paul founded the churches of Galatia, it's just north of that in northern, modern-day Turkey. And when you read Acts 2:9, the very first moment where the Holy Spirit came and established the church and the preaching of Peter, there's a list of places where people were from. And verse 9 speaks of various places - residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus in Asia, so, not only this general area of Asia, Pontus, specifically, this territory north of Galatia. There were people from Pontus who were at the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. And they were not too far away from the churches that were established by Paul in the first missionary journey as well. So, that's Aquila. There is a historical account of this persecution of Claudius in 49 AD in Rome where the Jews... the Jews were persecuted before 49 AD. They were suppressed, but finally Claudius the Emperor of Rome was so done with the Jews and the difficulties he was having with them, he kicked them out of Rome. So, this is how God sovereignly moved Aquila and Priscilla from Rome to Corinth where he intersected with the movement of Paul.

And so, this helps us, actually, to figure out when things are. I'm giving you dates of when this is happening here, this is happening at this time, and some of these dates... you can see as we're reading through Acts, we don't see the dates here, but we see events, and so here's an event that can help us be guided by the date. So, 49 AD is a pretty fixed date. So, Paul's time in Corinth, based on the movement and the seasons, we can pretty much say Paul was here from early spring of 51 AD to early autumn of 52 AD. So, that's kind of the time frame that we're looking at during these eighteen months where he's ministering in Corinth.

We see Aquila and Priscilla departing from Corinth later in the book. They are a significant couple. We find them ministering in Ephesus with Apollos who will become a very important person in ministry back in Corinth. He left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, and they remained there when Paul returned to Antioch. Also, (and that's where Ephesus is, so that'd be crossing back the Aegean Sea and then dropping them off at Ephesus and then headed back to Corinth) when Paul wrote to Romans, four years later he would write the book of Romans, we find another mention of these two people. He greeted Prisca which is the formal name of Priscilla. You'll sometimes see Aquila and Prisca, and Priscilla is more her nickname, her diminutive name. We find the church in Rome being referenced as meeting at their house in Romans 16:3-5. So, these people, Aquila and Priscilla, don't just minister with Paul in Corinth, they're dropped off at Ephesus. They have a ministry at Ephesus, and then later, four years later, we find them in Rome. They're able to go back to Rome after Claudius' time there, and we find them, the church in Rome, meeting at their house. So, I'd say these are pretty substantial individuals. Their name pops up in other epistles, too. We'll learn more about them later when we get toward the end of Acts, chapter 18.

So, what are they doing there? They're living with Paul. Paul's residing with them, and he's working with them in the same trade. So, he's working in tent making. They were of the same trade. That communicates that Paul already was able to do that trade. They were of the same trade. It's not that they introduced Paul to this job, he was already of that job because, as a background as a rabbi, he would have a trade skill. This kind of was a part of being a Jewish teacher, and that was his upbringing before he became a follower of Christ on the road to Damascus. He was a teacher of the Jews. He was a rabbi, and he would have a skill. This was part of what the Jewish people expected of their rabbis. Their teachers were to be able to have a skill. It wasn't just that you were a rabbi and nothing else, which explains why Jesus was a carpenter. So, he had some occupation to kind of fall back on because now he was by himself, and he'd fled from one place to another place that didn't have a church established yet, so he was needing to work.

This phrase, tentmaker, specifically refers to working with leather, not only tents, but it's just how the leather was commonly used in that day, with what Paul did. So, there's a meaning to the material as well as the end product. This leather working was undoubtedly in great demand. There was in 51 AD

in the spring, right about the time when Paul would be arriving in Corinth... they were preparing for what would kind of be a minor Olympic Games called the Isthmian Games. They were held in Corinth and there'd be people, then, traveling. Also, with the military, there'd be needs for tents as well. So, there was a demand for this product that certainly caused Aquila and Priscilla to want to move there because of the ability to sell what they were able to make and Paul joining with them. So, this work he did is, I think, very instructive to us. He's at the same trade. They were working. They were tentmakers.

And Paul when he works is viewing that not as, oh, bummer, I have to work. He's not looking at it that way, he saw great value in working. You look at passages that we see him referencing working and working with his hands and the value that he assigns to them. He does not see any special, greater value in that you're a more holy person simply because you are supported in ministry as opposed to those who are not. So, we have the apostle Paul working with his own hands, doing an occupation for a period of time here and had even been done at other places. When he speaks to the Thessalonians, he references his work there. So, this looks like something that didn't only happen in Corinth, but was just a part of Paul's way of supporting himself when he needed to have money in order to live and minister. He was not viewing this as a second-rate place in the Christian life and would speak well of it. And we get a chance to look at this because in here, in the New Testament, we find reasons to value work and ministry. And very few of us get to do what I do which is to be full-time supported and working at a church. Or, as the joke goes, I am paid to be good, and you're good for nothing. So, why is that so important that we have people that are working and doing ministry like Paul did at the same time?

There's a lot of reasons. I've just got seven here because they're in the New Testament, and I'd like to pass them along to you. One is that it avoids conflicts of interest. Whenever money is involved, there's kind of, like, questions about, you know, why are you doing this, and are you doing this just to have money? Are you like... am I talking to people just because I want them to come to our church, and if they come to our church, they give money to our church? And, you know, that sort of thing? Or, as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:17; "For we are not like the many who trade on the word of God..." And, let's face it, there's a lot of people who are in the occupation of religion, and they're making a killing. They're in triple digits

of salary and upward, and they're living in luxury... triple digits, I meant six figures. That's what I meant, for those of you keep track of money. So, this sense of, like, teaching the word of God in order to peddle it or get money out of people, I mean, that's something that Paul looked at as very distant from his ministry and so should we.

And then, there's what happens when we are looked at that way. It becomes a hindrance to the gospel. To avoid a hindrance to the gospel, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 9 which is in the context of being able to work and give and collect. He said, "...we endure all things..." (and that means working) "...we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ." So, there's value in being able to talk to people about Christ without being hindered by the occupation that looks like you're the professional. When people talk to me, they can sometimes think I'm different than them, like I'm a professional, like I'm just supposed to do this. It's advantageous to do this, or look like you're doing this, just simply because you care, and you believe in this, and it's important.

There's value in that, which leads us to the next thing, the ministry potential at work. There's ministry potential in the work place. Or, as Paul, once again, in Colossians 4:5; "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity." So, we have abundant opportunity when we are in a workplace environment to communicate with people that we would have, in other places, no ability to connect to them at all. We wouldn't even know these people. So, one very significant way that we, as the body of Christ, engage people is through the workplace. That's kind of how I ended up at the church, here, was because of my job that I came out here for when I was in college and as a co-op at NASA; and so, one thing led to the next through that, and I grew dramatically in my faith, and here I am. So, as you have a job, you have an opportunity in that job to minister to people who are unbelievers, and that is a special thing. And at times, there are people that the Lord has sovereignly brought into your path that you can communicate with and help them to understand about Jesus, or invite them to things that will help them to understand about Jesus. There's a great potential there, and I encourage you and exhort you to take advantage of that. Don't view your work as just a job but view it as a ministry.

Next, there's the example of followers, and this is, actually, 2 Thessalonians 3:8-9. In 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul explicitly says about his work (because,

remember, he's working in Corinth and he's writing this epistle to the Thessalonians) and he says, "...we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; ... so that you would follow our example." So, there's an example that he's giving to them that they could follow. Many of you know Laney Stroup. He's back in Alabama right now with his family, and in October, we'll be sending him to Japan to join with Daisuke and Marsha and the ministry in Japan. And he will be going there as a worker. He has a trade of being able to do computer work, design and programming, for this company that is actually located in Alabama, and that's his full time job, and he can do that in Japan. And when he goes to Japan and is doing this as well as ministering to the Japanese people and teaching - because he has a great ability to do that, and he's going to be very helpful to the ministry of the Japan Bible Academy that has begun in Japan - as he does that, he has a reason that he gives. There's more than this reason, but this is one reason that I thought, this is a really great reason, and that is that people in Japan are looking at the pastor of Japan to do, in the church in Japan, to do everything. So, the person who's leading the church is looked at as the professional, and everyone else just contributes money so he can do it; and Laney looks at that as one of the serious weaknesses of the church in Japan. And if he goes and works, then he can minister and have a job, just like the people of Japan ought to minister and have a job that's normal and should be done by them. So, he is looking to be an example like Paul was an example for these people to follow. That's cool.

And it also serves the church in Japan, which is our goal, to serve the church. And that's why Paul says there's been pastors and teachers established "...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service..." The people that are supposed to be doing the work of service aren't just the people who are paid to do it; it's all of these people that are part of it. It's all of you. That's why we can do soccer camp with 278 kids, and then the hundred workers in order to do that, and have the activities on Saturday that we had heard about that were going on here and onward out to VBS. So many things presently happening around us that are not happening by people who are being paid to do it. They're doing it out of the kindest of their heart toward ministry, and this serves the church. Without this, the church is greatly hindered from ministry. It is malnourished. It is working on small, very small, ability. We unleash the church to minister when we give the ability for people, and the expectation of the ability of people, to serve freely themselves. Churches that are driven by their staff are not as healthy.

Valley Bible Church  
3347 West Avenue J  
Lancaster, California 93536  
[www.valleybible.net](http://www.valleybible.net)

Next, they're servicing the Lord. In work, you're not just gaining money, you're actually serving the Lord. Paul says that in Colossians 3:23-24; "Do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men [you're serving the Lord], ... "It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." That's what Paul wrote, so when you're at your job, recognize that, that it's the Lord Christ whom you're serving, not just the person that's your boss. So, when we use the phrase serving the Lord, that should also be understood as even you in the work place are serving the Lord. Everything you do should be serving the Lord.

And finally, bottom line, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It's a wonderful thing to not be looking at how much I can get and how can it be easier for me? It's better to be the giver. Jesus said that. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul quoted Him in Acts 20:35, or if you want the red-letter edition, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." If Jesus says it, it's right, and you ought to adopt that as your belief, that it's better to be a giver than a taker. It's more blessed. So, having a job and earning money positions you to do ministry in a way that is very, very valuable, and our church will not be strong without that. And it's not just people like myself that are making our church strong, it is the people that are doing work and ministry at the same time, and Paul greatly valued it.

Finally, verse 4; "And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." So, that's what he was doing. So, before we move on in the next paragraph, we got to just remind ourselves of how often Paul does this. We saw this in Acts 17. We saw this in Thessalonica. We see this coming up in Ephesus in Acts chapter 19. We see his ministry approach is reasoning, is persuading, and here in Corinth, he's doing this. Reasoning can be translated more aggressively than just reasoning. It can be disputing, debating. This engagement and participation and back and forth and the discussions about Jesus, that's what's going on here. This isn't just communicate to them one dimensional. We ought to actively engage the mind of people in a dialogue. The attempt to help people understand about Jesus is not only, I talk to you, it is a dialogue. It is a reasoning together. So, when we communicate about Christ with people, we don't just think an understanding is just going to happen because I told you it. I sent you a memo and you got it. This understanding about Jesus is a reasoning. It's an engagement in the mind of a dialogue.

So, that's what Paul did, he reasoned in the synagogues. This reasoning and persuading is in the imperfect tense. That means it's ongoing, so this isn't something that we just drop off and don't continue to follow up with. We are continuing (every Sabbath is what Paul did) every occasion that we have to reason with people. He went to the synagogue because that's where he would go first as a Jew. He went to the Jews first, and they were the unbelievers in Corinth, and he sought to explain to them. As we encounter people, we're looking to reason with them. We're looking to engage them. This engagement regarding Jesus Christ is not a singular thing. We should not consider it to be a singular conversation. When we talk to people, we should see that is the beginning and the middle, not just the end, because we don't know how many conversations this is going to be involved. We're, basically, willing to talk to people until they tell us go away, leave us alone. I mean, we don't want to be rude to people. We don't want to annoy people but we want to be available to have conversations and to have... and if we don't know the answers to all the things they might have questions of, what a great way to learn some more and find out some more and continue that engagement back and forth. That's reasoning, and that's, hopefully, a little bit of what's going on here. Even though I think you're believers, still, we want to reason together, and we want to engage about the truth of Christ, so that you will know better about who Jesus is and what He wants you to do and how His followers lived.

And that's what we're doing this morning. So, as you come here, I hope you're coming here engaged in your mind. As you go out from here, I hope you go out engaged, looking to serve the Lord. And what better way to serve the Lord than is with one thing you can never do once you pass away. Once you pass away, you'll be with the Lord. You'll be worshipping the Lord, but you won't be evangelizing. You won't get the opportunity that you presently get to communicate about the truth of Jesus to people that don't believe, that are confused, or they might think they believe, but they haven't put all the dots together or whatever position they're in. You have unique opportunities right now, and all the busyness of your life, whether it's work or whether it's school or whatever it is, is not getting in the way of that task. In fact, it helps that task. It gives you opportunities that you don't have without those people surrounding you. So, take advantage of that and serve the Lord in that way. And may we patiently continue to help others understand the significance of

Christ's death and resurrection on their behalf. That's what Paul did. That's what we should do.