

## **A NEW CHURCH BEGINS IN CORINTH PRINCIPLES FOR CHURCH HEALTH AND GROWTH ACTS 18: 1-17**

Intro: The city of Corinth was one of the leading cities in the Roman empire. It had well over half a million inhabitants. It was in competition with Athens for a leading city. The city was known for the manufacture and sale of all kinds of goods. And the city was also known for its decadent lifestyle. It had been said of the city that to live a corrupt sinful sensual lifestyle was to be "Corinthianized"! Paul met Aquilla and Priscilla there; they were a Jewish couple who were believers as well. They had just recently been forced to leave Rome by Claudius, emperor of Rome. He had expelled all Jews. They were "tentmakers" along with Paul. So they chose to work together at that trade.

### **I. BI-VOCATIONAL MINISTRY STILL EXISTS TODAY AND IS VERY HONORABLE FOR THE PASTOR OR FAMILY WHO CHOOSES TO RECEIVE ALL OR PART OF THEIR INCOME FROM THAT LABOR – BUT THAT IS VIEWED AS A VEHICLE THROUGH WHICH THEIR GOSPEL WORK IS SUPPORTED**

- Currently Riverdale Baptist does not have enough income to support a full-time pastor with a part-time staff.
- In today's culture there are some young pastors who have a secular job while pastoring a church AND working with that local church to penetrate their city with the Gospel. Some

are receiving partial support from other churches and the North American Mission Board as they go to lost cities across America.

- If Riverdale is going to be able to have a full-time pastor (and have even greater attention on the church's mission), it is going to have to grow to about 175 to 200 people in attendance! But for now, as the church prepares for the next chapter in its life, it appears that the church will not be able to support a full-time pastor at the beginning of his ministry here. Therefore, it will be more difficult to find God's man.
- It is hard for a man to divide his life in two or three directions. A pastor that can devote the majority of his time and the core of his heart to his God-given call and the church he is equipping and leading and loving ... that pastor is going to be able to have the focus needed to lead the church forward. It is not impossible for a man to have a secular job AND serve the local church as its pastor. But most of these churches remain small and not as effective as if the pastor was devoting more of his life and energy to the mission of that local church. Riverdale is not in an easy place. But my dream is that Riverdale can indeed call a young, seminary trained, on fire pastor. One who will give his all to the mission here. One who has a burden for the whole Roanoke Valley and is ready to equip young adults to live as fully devoted followers of Jesus. When a church calls a pastor they are dealing with the act of God in calling a man to be a pastor. That is no small thing. He is NOT A HIRELING. He has been called of God, and that needs to be treated with the respect it is due.

- The church needs to take this into consideration as it faces the future. It will need to have a view to reaching people from all over the Valley and equip them to live for Christ AND equip them to help reach even more people in the Valley (including, of course, SE Roanoke). We can prepare NOW by being open, hospitable, evangelistic, and willing to pay a price to invest in others for Jesus' sake.
- When calling a new pastor, it will be presented to him that the church desires to grow and reach people from all over the Valley and SE Roanoke. Most pastors will be called with the view to becoming a full-time pastor in three to five years after being called to Riverdale. So our openness and love, our joy, our desire for others will need to grow during these days. If this church is to call a new pastor, then it will need a fresh vision and begin to grow now!
- And in time, when God calls a new pastor to Riverdale, he will begin as a part time pastor, but he can lead the church to grow in all ways; and eventually he can be the full time pastor to the church, this area of Roanoke, and to the whole Valley!

## **II. OUR JOB IS TO PERSUADE PEOPLE ABOUT THE WONDERFUL TRUTH THAT JESUS IS GOD'S ATONING SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS AND HE IS READY TO RECEIVE ALL WHO REPENT AND TRUST HIM**

Notice the word used here: PERSUADE – it is active, indicative which means it was something that was going on all the time! It means to CONVINCED, to help someone to be certain, to present the facts in such a way as to bring them to TRUST in those facts, etc.

We are here for ONE MAIN REASON: TO PERSUADE THIS ROANOKE VALLEY AND THE WORLD THAT JESUS IS SAVIOR AND LORD!

- You can't be soft and just back up into a shell if you are a Christian.
- We have a fantastic mission based on THE TRUTH.
- People here are in a mess, and we have a GREAT Savior to give them.
- This should be the "bent" of our life if indeed we have found the Savior (more on that below).
- Persuasion is by its very nature somewhat confrontational! We cannot just let our culture go down. We must present Christ lovingly but consistently and firmly.
- If this is to be our posture, we must be CONTINUAL LEARNERS of Jesus; there must be a daily walk with Him. His Cross will always be central to our thinking and living. We will realize that it is HIS PERFORMANCE that gives us the Victory, not our works or our righteousness.
- If we are convinced of that, then PERSUADING others will be a natural part of our daily life.

### **III. TELLING OTHERS ABOUT JESUS IS NOT A "JOB" BUT IT IS THE NORMAL OUTFLOW OF THE HEART THAT IS CONTINUALLY TOUCHED BY GOD'S WORD!**

CONSTRAINED = occupied (by the Word), afflicted, hemmed in, surround, seized, holding, distress. This verb was passive which means that the Word (and the Spirit) were at work within Paul. Since Paul was saved (and since WE TOO are saved), the Word and the Spirit would NOT let him go. There

is something supernatural about the work to which God has called us. To be a messenger desiring others to come to Jesus is NORMAL for EVERY CHRISTIAN. Silas and Timothy joined Paul, and their presence was a spark of encouragement and the Lord used that moment to provoke Paul in his inner man. Now I use a phrase sometimes that is a little "country" in its flavor but I like to put it this way: Paul had what I call "a case of the CAN'T HELP ITS." I will tell you that I like to be around people who have this in their life. It is something you cannot work up on your own. It is something you RECEIVE as you are saved, transformed, and as you grow in your awareness of the centrality of the Cross in your life. I will tell you this, if Riverdale is to grow and be a healthy church that God uses ... then this characteristic will need to be present in our lives. We will all need that passion that comes from the Spirit and the Word CONSTRAINING us to go people that need Jesus.

Notice what Paul was constrained to do: TESTIFY i.e. to WARN, TO SOLEMNLY WITNESS, INSIST. This was not your "nicey nicey politically correct" guy. He was hard after the people telling them, in love of course, but telling them nonetheless this JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH—the CHRIST, THE ONE AND ONLY SAVIOR GOD HAD SENT TO SAVE THE WORLD. There is no other way to God. God is not that dumb to go to all the trouble to write biblical history and then send the Christ if there was another way!!! I tell people, so you think there are many ways to God? Well why pretell did God go through all the hassle to preserve the Davidic lineage and bring Jesus into the world, have Him live a perfect life, then have Him bear the sins of the world suffering an excruciating death for OUR sins and rise again to prove it was all true ... why would He do all

that if there was another way! I am sure as Paul was going around telling and testifying, he was calling men to repent of their sinful lives. In other words, this constraint that God gives is a call to get the Word of the Cross and Resurrection and the Person of Jesus to all around us. If we are constrained, we will testify of Jesus. And if there is no or little constraint; well then you just have to wonder what in the world has happened to you? Are you saved? Are you in the Word? Are you desiring to hear from God? Is there some ongoing sin in your life?

Friends I will tell you this; when a Christian has this CONSTRAINT from the Lord, the Christian life is SO MUCH MORE ENJOYABLE. It is our common mission. We TOGETHER are to make a Gospel difference LOCALLY and GLOBALLY.

#### **IV. HEARING – BELIEVING – BAPTISM: PEOPLE HAVE TO “HEAR” BEFORE THEY CAN RESPOND IN TRUE REPENTANCE AND FAITH**

The major problem I see in our area is the WOEFUL LACK OF ANY BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORD OF GOD. Even in and around our church, people have Bibles but never read them. There is SO MUCH MISUNDERSTANDING about Jesus and the church. People do not think the church is anything but a social club, a nice group. There is NOTHING SUPERNATURAL that people notice.

Our challenge is to get the first word above accomplished – WE MUST DO EVERYTHING THROUGH HIS ABILITY IN US TO GET GOD’S WORD IN THE HEARTS OF AS MANY PEOPLE AS

POSSIBLE. Have you noticed that everything in our culture is challenging the attention of people ... they can watch a screen and play "pokemon go" for HOURS and HOURS ON END. But they have a hard time focusing on the Bible for more than thirty seconds. We have youth who have seen adults in church not focused on anything but themselves (there are, praise God, exceptions) and as a result they do not see anything CONSTRAINING anyone—much less a burning desire to tell them about Jesus! We can have activity without mission or passion. If we as adults do not take God's Word seriously, then how in the world do we expect our children to take it seriously?

- ❖ God's Word does not return void - Isaiah 55:11
- ❖ God's Word is powerful - Heb. 4
- ❖ God's Word is used by the Spirit over time; it is the sword of the Spirit.
- ❖ The basic truths of the Gospel are essential. This is what must be given to others; we cannot help them act on these truths but they cannot act properly until the Cross of Christ is understood and the Person of Jesus is real to them. We can help people "get" the facts and the work Jesus did on the cross – the reality of Jesus' shed blood for their (our) sins.
- ❖ Our job as a church is to do all we can to get the truth of God's Word (mainly about Jesus) into the minds and hearts of people so they will be able to respond properly to Jesus.
- ❖ Romans 10 verse 14 tells us: *"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"* Then in verse

17: *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*

**BELIEVING** – Thank God that He uses His Word to bring conviction of sin and conviction that Jesus is THE SAVIOR! We become frustrated with ourselves and realize as long as we continue without Jesus, life itself will be futile. We need to repent and trust Jesus. We BELIEVE! Believing is NOT PASSIVE. It is very active; it is an act of the whole person surrendering to another Person, namely Jesus Christ. And He forgives and changes.

**BAPTISM** – The inward radical change is demonstrated by outward actions of obedience to Jesus. Baptism is a PUBLIC display of a person that has died to the old life and has been raised again to a new life. It is identification with the Cross of Christ. It is PUBLIC! I want to speak to our young people; if you follow Jesus you will lose some friends and gain some friends. You will be mocked for obeying Jesus and some will deride you for being too good now. Some will challenge your friendship by suggesting that if you are really their friends then you will commit sinful acts with them to prove you are still their friend. They will want you to do stuff that proves to them that you have really not been forgiven by Jesus and changed by Jesus. They do not want to believe or have ANYONE show to them that Jesus is real. And that is one reason why baptism is public; it is a public demonstration of the Cross of Christ. And it is convicting. I would like nothing better than to see some of our students repent and yield to Jesus and follow Him in baptism and an obedient life. I believe if one or two came this morning and said to this pastor "I need

to repent and give my life to Jesus” that others would follow in the weeks to come. Our students are looking for something; they realize they need a Savior but they are looking to the safety of their “friends” and they are expressing their feelings in ways that will hurt them. But if some were to come and GENUINELY give their heart to Jesus, He would enable them to follow Him. And that would affect MANY MANY other students. Some of you TODAY are thinking about Jesus and really giving life over to Him. Why don’t you come today?

**V. WHEN WE LET GO AND FOLLOW JESUS WITH ABANDON HE ENCOURAGES US WITH AFFIRMATION AND ENABLES US TO “HANG IN THERE” AND “STICK WITH IT” – BUT THERE ARE SOME TIMES IN WHICH WE HAVE TO MOVE ON (vs 6ff)**

Note that Paul again had to leave and basically said (quoting Ezekiel) ... okay I have tried with all my heart to tell you the truth but you refused to hear. I am going on to people who will listen. Now please note that this was after humble and Spirit-led efforts to share Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Paul preached that Jesus was/is the Christ. But Paul left them and said: “your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean.”

Then Paul ended up going right next door!! What an irony to the ones who would not listen. And the ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, ended up believing in Jesus!

Note that in the face of this opposition the Lord Jesus spoke to Paul (in my Bible these words are in red because they are the

words of Jesus!) in vss. 9 & 10. When we are in difficult situations the Lord will help us see His direction and His hand at work to give us encouragement just at the right time. Sometimes when a person extends themselves for so long they just get "tired" and at that moment discouragement can jump like a wild animal and overtake us. And it is at those moments we need the encouragement from the Lord.

Note that Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth teaching the Word of God among them. And please note the CORE of the ministry that is mentioned here is TEACHING THE WORD OF GOD. Friends, we need God's Word more than anything else we do.

## **VI. GOD USES A SECULAR JUDGE TO GIVE AN OPEN DOOR!**

A NON JUDGEMENT THAT WAS REALLY A JUDGEMENT AGAINST RELIGION DOMINATING THE CIVIL ORDER – UNDER GALLIO THE AUTHORITIES WOULD NOT INTERVENE AND THAT LEFT CHRISTIANITY FREE TO OPERATE UNDER THE LAW – IT WAS A RELIGIOUS MATTER AND NOT A CIVIL MATTER

Since we are free to share Jesus in this country, we need to utilize our freedoms as much as is possible. That gets back to what we covered earlier: WE NEED TO PERSUADE, WE NEED TO TESTIFY, we need to help people by giving them God's Word about the Living Savior Jesus! People are hurting all around us. They will only be helped if they see people around them who are CONSTRAINED ... PEOPLE WHO HAVE A CASE OF THE "CAN'T HELP ITS!" Time is short, people are lost; who is

going to care for them? May God give us a DEEP BURDEN and TROUBLE our souls so that we cannot fall back into a RUT! Lord give us YOUR FOCUS and YOUR BURDEN for the children, the students, the parents, the grandparents, the homes that are in BONDAGE today. We have the Savior. Help us encourage people to Repent. We CAN make a difference for Jesus here at Riverdale.

Jesus is real. He is here! He wants to take your sin and guilt on Himself today! Will you surrender your heart? He IS CALLING YOU TO COME TO HIM. As we sing, if you would like to trust Jesus, please come. If you would like to serve the Lord and be equipped in the Word through this church, please come and let the pastor know that. If there is some need for prayer and you would like someone to pray with you, please come. The Lord and His people are ready to receive YOU!