

Acts 18 - John Karmelich

One of the most important things I ever learned about living the Christian life is, "It's not a million solo efforts making a difference for Jesus, but people working together to make that difference." Of course I know working with others means problems will occur as egos clash. I state that, as Chapter 18 focuses on Christians other than Paul (the main character) who were also using their lives significantly to make a difference for Jesus. I'm not saying we must do exactly like all these people did. I'm just saying we're going to read of a number of people here using the talents as such. These other stories are given in this chapter to give us examples of how we can make a difference for Him. Let me explain further:

Here in Acts Chapter 18 Paul finishes his second of his three missionary journeys. We're now about 20 years since the resurrection. This chapter mostly takes place in parts of Greece and Turkey, but we also read of Paul's return to Israel and even the start of his third missionary journey. Chapter 18 is mostly a report of Paul's visit in the Greek city of Corinth. It was a big city on a key port location. It also had an anything goes reputation (kind of like what many people think of Las Vegas as an example). Anyway, Paul worked on starting a church in this city. With that said, realize this chapter has more verses about other believers than about Paul himself.

Let me summarize the chapter and you'll realize why I mention these facts. Chapter 17 ended with Paul leaving Athens where he debated the leading philosophers of that day. In Chapter 18, it opens with him going to Corinth without any of his companions. Corinth had one of the largest temples of the world at that time. Their temple was also known as a prostitution center! The text says Paul was discouraged as he went to Corinth alone. He then met two Jewish-Christians who were in the same trade as Paul. It is a reminder that when we're discouraged and lonely (as Paul did here) God can bring people in our lives to help. In this case it was a husband/wife couple who worked in the same trade as Paul. They worked together with Paul in the business of making tents. Paul did this to show he wasn't preaching Jesus for profit! When it was the Sabbath, Paul "did what he did" and went to the synagogue to persuade people about Jesus. Paul didn't give out tracks or wear a sandwich board! ☺ He just preached what God called him to preach. He had some success as the synagogue leader converted to Christianity.

Around that time, Timothy and Silas (who were Paul's traveling companion on this journey) showed up in Corinth. A cute joke here is Paul got so frustrated with the Jewish people who didn't believe him that he went all the way to a house next door to the synagogue, where that family converted to Christianity. At the same time Timothy and Silas brought Paul a money gift to free him to focus on what God called him to do. (We know that from one of Paul's letters.)

The Jewish people who refused to believe in Jesus tried a new strategy to stop Paul. They accused him of preaching an illegal religion. Rome had a list of approved religions. If one's religion was not on the "approved list", one could be arrested and a "precedent" could be set that makes the preaching of Jesus illegal. The good news is that judge ruled Christianity's a sect of Judaism, which means it's considered an approved religion.

One gets the impression Paul was discouraged from dealing with all of this. God spoke to Paul here to say in effect, "Hang around this place for awhile, lots of believers are here". So Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months. From there Paul returned to Israel. He was grateful for how the court ruled, so he took a Jewish vow to cut his hair and perform a specific ritual. It made him hurry to get to Jerusalem (to the temple) to finish the vow. It's how that second missionary journey ends. Remember we're dealing with "transition". I just mean Christians don't have to take such vows or bring a bunch of cut hair to church!

When we convert to Christianity from another religion, often it takes time for old habits to die off. The book of Acts has examples of Peter and Paul changing their lifestyles from Judaism rituals, to living as God desired! I know from how I was raised as a Roman Catholic, it took a while change old habits. I'm just saying we to have patience for people to live as God desires us to live.

Remember I mentioned a husband and wife team in the same trade as Paul? Their names were Priscilla and Aquila. They also had a "travel bug" and the text says they moved to a few different places in their lifetime. They ended up joining Paul, along with Timothy, Silas and Luke as they all worked their way back from Turkey to Israel. Their travels are briefly discussed here, as Paul's third missionary journey begins in Verse 23 of this chapter. We then get a story switch as if to say, "Everybody is packing their bags to hit the road again, what will happen to the church in Corinth?" That's why the final verses here speak of a new character named Apollos. Let me tell his story in the next paragraph:

Apollos was a disciple of John the Baptist and knew about Jesus' baptism, but not the resurrection. He had a gift for public speaking and a great ability to lead people to Jesus. He's kind of like a 1st Century Billy Graham! That leads to lots of questions: Why bring him up at this point? Apparently he did not even encounter Paul until much later. How does he tie to the surrounding story? The answer leads back to my first sentence in this sermon. Christianity is designed to be teamwork as we lead others to be part of the ministry. Apollos needed someone to explain the resurrection to him, so he'd grasp the full story of the Messiah. Just as Paul's new friends (Aquila and Priscilla helped him in Corinth) plus old friends showing up at that time, made it possible for Christians to work together to make the type of difference that God is looking for in our lives.

That leads back to you and me. If we're just sitting at home listening to bible studies or writing stuff no one reads we're not making a difference for Jesus. If we're interacting with others and helping them to grow closer to God and letting others work with us to make a difference for Him, then we're living the type of life God intended us to live. When we do that God will even use nonbelievers just as the judge in Corinth who tried Paul's case to work for His glory. I'm not saying everything will go perfectly well when we're making a difference for Jesus. Problems will occur. Heck, Paul was constantly beaten up and spent time in jail for what he preached! I'm not saying we have to suffer on purpose. I'm saying it will come with the territory as we use our lives for Jesus. The good news is God brings other people in our lives so that together we make a difference for Him. That's what God desires we do with our lives, use them as a team to make a difference for Him.

With that said, on the same page where you downloaded this summary is a more detailed lesson on this chapter. That one is on a verse-by-verse basis. To read that, click on one of the other two links on this chapter. If you want, you are always welcome to e-mail me and I hope you like this. Thanks, John