

Title: What's Under Your Skin?
Text: Acts 18:1-17
Theme: The threat of the gospel
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: The message of the gospel is a threat to arrogant people

Read Text:

For those of you born after 1990 there used to be these things called maps. You could probably find one at the Henry Ford Museum or Smithsonian right next to typewriters. Most of them were rather large, but would fold up into a handy size, provided you folded them correctly without losing your salvation in the process. Then, GPS devices were developed and now, like everything else it's on your phone. But, something has happened. Here's what I mean. A friend of mine, from another part of Detroit met me for lunch one day. Before he left he said, "I have no idea where I am, I just followed my phone." He found the restaurant, but had no idea where he was in relationship to everything else. I don't what that to happen to us in our study of the book of Acts. I want you to know this text, but I want you to see how this is related not only to the rest of the book of Acts, but I want you to see how this is all part of a much bigger picture. This morning I am not going to go in depth on this account. We're going to set down the microscope and pick up the camera with the wide angle lens.

On the surface, the book of Acts is about the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the establishment of churches from Jerusalem to Rome through the ministry of the apostles following the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ. This book was written by Luke, as the follow-up to the gospel account that bears his name. Luke traveled with Paul part of the time, so this account follows his travels and it tells his stories. Acts is the historical introduction to the rest of the New Testament. It gives us the background so that we understand the settings and audiences for many of the epistles that make up the rest of the NT. For example, here in the beginning of Acts 18, we read of Paul's first visit to Corinth. We find out that he was there for 18 months, which was a long time for Paul to stay in any one place and that he had quite an impact upon the city. There are a number of things that happen here that help us understand why Paul said the things he did in his letters to the Corinthians that come later on in the NT.

But, there is more here than the facts of history. The book of Acts is part of the Bible and the Bible tells the whole story. The whole story is THE story and THE story is our story. And I want you to see how this account (and the stories of Acts) fit into the whole picture. I want you to know: 1) What is really going on. 2) How we (sadly) help the enemy and 3) How can we help advance the gospel (which is the advancement of the church and the kingdom of Jesus. This helps you understand why the birth and expansion of the church took place in the midst of intense racial conflict. The tension between the Jewish believers and the Jews who did not believe, was not just a disagreement about whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. There was tension and violence because of the implications of the message of the gospel. This morning, I want you to understand that the underlying problem then, is the same issue we face now. I want you to know what is really going on. I want you to know what the sides are so you know who the enemy is, what he is up to, so that we don't help him out, but instead fully participate with the captain of our salvation and our commander in chief so that we finish our deployment in this life

faithfully, effectively and joyfully. The sermon this morning is like a funnel. It starts big and wide, but it will get narrow and focused.

My daughter is in a hostile part of the world and is nearing the end of her deployment there with the U.S. Army. Cathi and I asked her recently how we could pray for her, and she said pray that she finishes strong. She wants to do her job 100% every day. The mission is not done until her team is on the plane heading home. That is true for you. If you are a follower of Christ, your life is your deployment and your death is the plane that takes you home. You are not on the plane yet. Some of you look kind of close, but until we get on the plane, we have a mission to accomplish. So,

I. What is really going on?

Let's look at our text. Paul arrives in the city of Corinth. The man needs to have a place to stay and food to eat. Since he is a tentmaker by trade, he found a couple (Aquila and Priscilla) who were also tentmakers and he began to work with them in their little home business. Aquila and Priscilla were Jews who had been living in Rome, where they presumably had a tent-making business. But, the emperor Claudius, kicked all of the Jews out of Rome (A.D. 49), so Aquila and Priscilla were in Corinth for a time. Paul not only worked with them, he stayed with them. On the Sabbath days, he would go to the synagogue and shared the gospel with the Jews and the Gentiles who also attended. This is what Paul always did. He took the gospel (the message of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone) to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles.

Unsurprisingly, this resulted in a number of people coming to faith in Christ, and a number of others becoming hostile to Paul. The opposition became intense, so that by the time Silas and Timothy, show up in Corinth, it sounds as if Paul leaves the synagogue because enough Jews dug in their heels and were rejecting Christ as the Messiah and were reviling Paul. The conflict had apparently become too intense for Paul to keep going to the synagogue but, the conflict did not go away. The ruler of the synagogue (Crispus) has become a believer as well as his family and a man who lives next door to the synagogue. So, Paul goes next door, which I think means that Paul is preaching and holding services at this house instead of the synagogue. The animosity gets worse. I am guessing that Crispus, who was the ruler of the synagogue eventually either steps down or is removed from this position because he has become a believer. Another man by the name of Sosthenes is identified as the ruler of the synagogue. The Jews who reject the gospel get together and they capture Paul and they drag him before the local authority who could care less about all of this. He doesn't want to hear it and doesn't want to get involved and kicks them out of the tribunal. Somehow Paul escapes, but his adversaries are jacked up for a fight, so they grab Sosthenes who is the current ruler of the synagogue, whom it seems has also professed faith in Christ, and is obviously in the crowd and they beat him in front of the tribunal and Gallio refuses to do anything.

This is not unusual is it? A similar hostile and violent response happened in Cyprus, then in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, and now in Corinth. In fact, the reason why Claudius ordered all Jews out of Rome was because there was so much controversy over Jesus. Claudius could care less about who was right and who was wrong, he just wanted peace, so he threw all of the Jews out of Rome. What is it that is so controversial? Hold on to that question.

In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul writes about God carrying out a plan that was not understood. He calls it the secret and hidden wisdom of God which God had decreed before the ages for our glory. In Ephesians 3 Paul again speaks of the mystery of Christ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations but has been made known to the apostles and *“this mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”* In Colossians 1 Paul again speaks of *“the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.”* He goes on to say that *“God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you (plural), the hope of glory.”* Later when we get into the book of Revelation we go with John into the throne room of God where in chapter 4 God is receiving worship and glory because (note this) He is God and because He is Creator. The focus of the worship in chapter 4 is because of WHO God is as Sovereign Creator. In chapter 5, the focus of worship expands to WHAT God has done. What has God done? *“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood, you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people an nation and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth.”* This is point at which the curtains are pulled way back and John sees every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and in the sea and ALL THAT IS IN THEM, saying, *“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”* Do you see the connection? The plan of God carried out by the Son of God to redeem the people of God out of the nations of the world and to form them in the kingdom of God is the occasion for the entire creation to pour out thunderous and overwhelming praise to God. This is the plan of God. This is the culmination of the plan of God. And this moment right here is the very thing that Satan hates with his entire being and is hell-bent on stopping even if he has to destroy the entire earth and everything in it. He is given completely over to stopping this.

Whatever God’s plan is, Satan hates it, opposes it and does everything he can to stop it or destroy it. Satan hates God. Satan despises God and therefore he despises everything that God is and loves. One of our missionaries recently shared an account of a woman who had been demon possessed and in the course of helping her, he said that what came out of her mouth, was chilling in its hatred and venom against God’s people. We know that Satan hates God’s plan to create one unified people from every tribe, language and nation. Going all the way back the tower of Babel, it has been Satan’s goal to unify the world in its rebellion against God. The book of Revelation speaks of the anti-kingdom, ruled by the anti-Christ that will attempt to unify the world again in its rebellion against God. Satan can only build a unity on the basis of hate and fear. God builds a kingdom on Jesus and the gospel. The story of the Bible is the story of two kingdoms: the kingdom of man vs. the kingdom of God. And here is why the kingdom of man will never work. Here is why this world will never unite itself into a one world government that will stay together. Our world does not have anything that is sticky enough to keep all of the different nations and races together. What is the kingdom of Satan built on? It is built on Satan hating the King and trying to usurp his rightful position. Therefore, if that is what drives the driver, what do you think the rest of the kingdom will be infected with? This is why the kingdoms of this world do not last. They are always infected with people who will sell each other out in their effort to get to the top, only to find that those under them will throw them under the bus at the first opportunity. The best

our world can come up with is fear. If you don't unite, you will be destroyed. It has always been like that.

This plan of God to have one people from every tribe, language and nation who form the kingdom of God means that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. It means that there is not a master race. There is not an ethnicity, nation, or race that is inherently better than any other. When God chose Israel, he did not choose them because they were superior, but because they were so lowly and inferior in the eyes of the world. They were supposed to be an example to the world of what God will do through lowly people. The point was supposed to be very clear. If this is what God can do through a nation of uneducated slaves who cannot free themselves from their owners, God can rescue anyone. If God will love them and provide for them and protect them and use them, he can do that for anyone. That reality was lost on them. They reinterpreted history as if God had chosen them because they were better and therefore, for Jews to associate with Gentiles was beneath them and offensive to them and they misused their law and customs as an excuse for their arrogance and rebellion. What I want you to see is that racism has always been an enemy to the plan of God. Racism is inherently Satanic. Therefore, racism is going to be an ongoing problem in this world until Jesus returns because the world cannot fix the problem of racism without the gospel. The church that understands the implications of the gospel and the goal of the gospel is going to be a threat to Satan's plan. And Cornerstone, I want us to be what God has called us to be, I want us to be an awesome weapon for the plan of God in the hand of God. I want us to be a ground-shaking threat to the enemy of our King and our souls. Instead, the story of the church has often been the story of forgetting what the plan is. Even in the early church, the idea that Jesus was the Messiah and that there was forgiveness in his name was accepted by many Jews, but many of them stumbled over accepting Gentiles as their brothers and sisters. Years later it was the Gentiles who stumbled over accepting the Jews and this has been the hard. But, Jesus didn't come just for the Jews. He came to redeem a people from every nation and the people from every tribe, language and people all form one new people who all stand together on equal ground around the throne of God. V. 10 – I have people here. Jesus has people all over the world and his people are our people. Our mission is to find those people and we do so by preaching the gospel, knowing that his people will hear it and believe.

II. How do we help the enemy?

We help the enemy when we forget that we are just as needy as everybody else. We help the enemy when we think that there is something about us that is slightly better than someone else. We help the enemy when we think that someone else needs a little more grace for salvation than we do. We help the enemy when we think that we are followers of Christ because we are smarter, wiser, and more insightful than someone else. We help the enemy when we forget that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. What is the heart of racism? The heart of racism is self-righteousness and self-righteousness is THE enemy of the gospel. Self-righteousness says, I'm ok, I've got this on my own. Or I'm pretty good, I just need a little help. Or, I'm not perfect, but I am sure better than that guy or that group. Self-righteousness is what drives works-righteousness, which is the idea that I can do things (moral things, religious things) to merit God's favor. If I pray the rosary, if I light an candle, if I serve at a soup kitchen, if I give to charity, if I donate my car to Mother Waddles, if I How is this manifested in racism? My people are better than your people. But when you narrow the conversation down to one race or

ethnicity, you find that even within that race there is the belief that my family is a little better than your family. And when you narrow the conversation down to one family you find that there is the belief among family members of those who think that they are a little better than the rest of the family. So, how do we help the enemy? We help the enemy when we think that we are somehow just a little better than someone else. Every single one of us is tempted to believe that.

We actually become Christians, when we stop relying upon who we are and what we have done and instead trust in Christ. We trust in Christ because of who he is and what he has done. He is the God-man who lived a perfectly righteous life in our place and then died on the cross as the full and final payment for our sin. That means that there is nothing left for us to pay. There is nothing left for us to do. Jesus did it all, in our place. We trust in him. I help the enemy when I think that there is something about me that makes me appealing to Jesus as opposed to someone else. There is nothing about me that makes me more savable than another person. It is not the country I was born in, the family I came from, the skill set I have or resources I have access to. God is not impressed with any of that, but I help the enemy when I forget that and think that my family is a cut above another, or my race is slightly better than another, or my nationality is inherently better than another.

I help the enemy when I tolerate sin, excuse sin, minimize my sin or defend myself when confronted with my sin. I am helping the enemy because I am not recognizing how serious my need is and how much I am in need of and dependent upon Christ. I help the enemy when I look at how others perceive me or what I have accomplished as some sort of validation instead of trusting in Christ alone. I help the enemy when I think that I don't need as much grace as someone else does or when I don't appreciate the fact that on my own I really am spiritually bankrupt. This is why, the biggest challenge to the gospel is me and understand how much I really need Jesus. We know that the gospel is sinking into the marrow of our bones when we are more skeptical of ourselves and trusting of God, because normally we are skeptical of God and trusting in ourselves.

III. **How do we advance the cause of the gospel?**

When Claudius allowed the Jews to return to Rome, many of them did including Aquila and Priscilla. We know this because Paul sends them greetings and a shout-out in Romans 16.3. The return of the Jewish believers to the church created some opportunities for tension in the church there. For the two years while the Jews were gone, the Gentile believers in the church were now left in charge which means they were finally able to serve some slap your momma good ribs at the church picnic. How do we help the Jewish believers re-enter the church? That is the issue that Paul is attempting to help them with when he writes to them the book of Romans. The book of Romans starts with this ground-leveling, foundational reality. If you are from an immoral background, you are a sinner whose sin has so offended a holy God that you stand condemned and you cannot save yourself. If you are from a moral background, your self-righteousness is so sinful and so offensive to God that you stand condemned and you cannot save yourself. If you are from a religious background, your self-righteousness and hypocrisy is so sinful and so offensive to God that you stand condemned and you cannot save yourself. Do you see what this does? The immoral person is prone to admit that he has been immoral but at least he is not a hypocrite like the religious person. The moral person is prone to think of himself as being better

than the immoral person and better than the religious person who claims to follow God. The religious person is prone to think that his religious labels, traditions, associations and ceremonies must count for something and at least he acknowledges God and goes to church while the others don't. Each group tries to find a reason why they are at least a little better than others. We advance the gospel when we accept the fact that we all start at the same place. We advance the gospel, therefore when we accept the fact that all that we have and all that we need is Jesus. The immoral person repents of his immorality and turns to Jesus. The moral person repents of his self-righteousness and trusts in Jesus. The religious person repents of his works-righteousness and trusts in Jesus. Jesus did for me and for you and for you and for you and for you what none of us could do for ourselves. He paid the penalty for my sin and that penalty and that payment was an infinite payment. The payment for your sin was not \$49 and mine was \$350 and hers was \$23 and his was \$3700, etc. My sin was against an infinitely holy God and demands a payment of infinite worth. Only Jesus is that payment. His perfect life is infinitely worthy. His sacrificial death is infinitely sufficient. He paid it all. I advance the gospel when I view myself as being completely dependent on the grace of God that was sufficient for me. I advance the gospel when I view you as being completely dependent on the grace that was sufficient for you. That means that I do not have to live proving myself to you, defending myself and you do not have to prove yourself to me or defend yourself to me. Jesus is our defense. Jesus is our worth. This frees us to be family. We're all adopted and we're all born into the family, only our birth is the new birth. So, we are all in by blood and we're all chosen through adoption by grace. Our standing is an equal standing. We advance the gospel when we acknowledge the equal standing afforded to every single believer in Christ and we value one another, cherish, treasure, esteem, welcome, serve, love, and embrace one another.

We advance the gospel when our life together can only be explained by the gospel. Why would older people love to sing contemporary sounding songs about Jesus? For some it is because they love contemporary sounding songs. But for all it is because they love Jesus and they love younger people more than themselves and view younger believers as being just as valued and important as they are. Why would younger people love to sing more traditional sounding songs about Jesus? For some it is because they love and prefer traditional sounding songs. But, for all it is because they love Jesus and they love older believers more than themselves and love the fact that these seasoned saints have opportunities to express their worship in terms that speak deeply to them. Why would African-American believers make this majority white congregation their home? (And can I say to all of my African-American brothers and sisters, I am so grateful for you and am so grateful for your willingness to believe that this church is serious about living out the implications of the gospel and being a preview of the kingdom of Jesus. Your membership here helps us as a church display the message of the Bible. Your membership in this church is an answer to prayer. Your membership in this church displays the implications of the gospel and the plan of God.) So, back to my question, why would African-American believers in this country with our history and in this city, with our past and present issues make this majority white congregation their home? It is because they love the family of Jesus and see that the family of Jesus is bigger than one race.

Cornerstone, we're on deployment. We're on a mission for the King. That mission for the Bride, the church to make herself ready for the return of the King. We help make the Bride ready as we

participate in the plan that God has to redeem a people from every tribe, language and nation, and live together as the people of God because we will do that forever and ever with our King.

Acts 18:10

1. Do I tend to see myself as being a little better than others?
2. Do I tend to hold certain people at arm's length?
3. How can I let the day, when people of every kindred, every tribe, every language gather around the throne to worship Christ, influence the way I live on this day?
4. Have you ever trusted in Jesus?