

Striking Similarities (Part 1) – Acts 18:1-11

Acts 18; But don't let that confuse you

We're starting a new series and a new study of 1 Cor this year – a study that I'm pretty excited about, and overwhelmed with at the same time
In order to do that, I want to take the first half of this message to set the series up, prepare your heart to receive it, and give you some background on the book itself

That's my goal this morning – set this up, prepare your heart, and give u some background
And that's where Acts 18 will come in, but we won't get there for about 25 minutes

- Re the series, I was having a breakfast conversation with my daughter Jessica a few weeks back, where we were talking about it
And she was asking me what I was going to call it, and I'm like – “I don't know, I can't settle on something”

And in the course of the conversation, she mentioned that she was actually reading *through* 1 Cor at the time . . .
And though she was only in chapter 7, she observed that “those people had *issues*”

And as soon as she said it, I was like – “That's it! That's the series title – Issues”
To which she agreed, but only if I gave her the credit
So Jessica – **Issues** it is, and the credit is yours

And the reason I latched on to it, is b/c depending on how you count, Paul addresses between 10 and 15 of them in this letter
Issues *they* had, and issues that still plague us in the church today – or at least threaten to

- And I want to encourage you as we go through this book, not to listen with someone else in mind, or some *other* church in mind . . .
But to listen for yourself, with *our* church in mind

If the shoe fits – wear it; If the truth hurts – take heed; If the message applies – change
But whatever you do, don't sit in judgment of someone else . . .
Don't listen with the church down the street in mind . . .
And don't stay away just b/c you don't like the conviction that comes with the message, or b/c you don't think you have any issues to begin with

Everybody has issues; Everybody has blind spots; Everybody has growth areas
Everybody has tendencies – I do, you do, we all do; None of us are exempt
And critical to our spiritual growth and the ongoing health of our church – is that we *listen* for ourselves
It's the only way we'll ever address the issues in *our* lives, let alone avoid them in our church

To that end then, at the start of this new year, I'd like for you to do something with the messages that maybe you've never done – 3 things actually
Call them **New Year's Resolutions** if you will; And the first one is to . . .

1. Review your message notes each week

I'm thinking just once, and preferably early in the week while it's still fresh

If you'd like, you can even use my message notes, which are usually posted on our website by Monday afternoon

Either way, let me encourage you as part of your quiet time, to review what you heard on the weekend

Why not capitalize on the time you spent *listening* to the message, by going back over it to soak it up

2. Consider how it applies to you

I was so encouraged recently to hear a guy tell me that every Monday morning, he sits down for his quiet time with the Lord, puts his notes in front of him . . .
And prayerfully considers what God would have him *do* in light of what he heard

I love that, b/c it prevents the “in-one-ear-and-out-the-other” syndrome that we most often gravitate to, don't we?

The “I'm-on-to-the-next-thing, tyranny-of-the-urgent” tendency that fills our life and consumes our attention

Better that you go deep on a little, than spread yourself thin on a lot
That you do a few things well, instead of a 100 things mediocre

3. Pick one action point for that week

It could be a thought you want to dwell on; Or a thing you need to do
Or an attitude you need to change
Whatever it is – pick one, write it down on an index card for your pocket, or in your journal, and follow through

Review your message notes, consider how they apply, and pick an action point
Will you do that? I hope so
B/c our upside will continue to be huge if you do, and our downside minimal

- That said, it's 1 Cor and the issues Paul addresses, and it's going to take some *time*
We're going to study this book in depth

That means, if a message is better divided into 2 parts, I'm going to preach it in 2 parts
In fact, this message is a perfect example of that
I'm only going to cover Similarity #1 this week . . .
So you can feel free to use the back side of your notes if necessary, and pick up a new one next week . . .
Or, you can bring it back and finish it off

Sometimes I'll split messages, and sometimes, if a passage begs for a mini-series on a particular issue, which several do –
Like the Lord's Supper, and Speaking in Tongues, and Marriage . . .
Then we'll set aside the time and explore them a bit further

- What that means for our ministry year calendar, I don't know
I don't know if we'll finish this study by the end of August, or not
If not, I'm not sure what I'll do re a new ministry year, and theme, and series, and all that we've normally done in that past . . .

But I do know that I don't want to rush through this just to be finished by September
There have been occasions in the past where I've done that, and I feel like I short-
changed you

I want to study this as *much* as I possibly can, and teach you as *best* I possibly can . .
B/c this book, and the issues it addresses, are worth knowing and worth avoiding at all
costs – even the adjustment of our calendar
Which is probably a bigger “issue” for me than it is for you, so bear with me

- Alright, that's what I want to say to set this series up
And here's what I want to say to prepare your heart
It's the thing that jumped off the page at me as I was preparing

There are **Striking Similarities**, uncanny similarities, between their church and our
church
And not only between our churches, but our cultures – the culture in Corinth and the
culture in North America
And therefore, no surprise here – striking similarities between the issues they faced, and
the issues *we* face
You can't miss it – there are striking similarities

So we'd do well to learn the lessons of their day, in order to live the life in ours
It's the same *simple* idea as the *Old* Testament people of God we've been studying

The lives and situation and issues of the Corinthian church, were written down for our
instruction just like theirs were
Recorded so that we would avoid their failures, and emulate their successes
That we would live as the church in the world, without the world in the church

That's the thrust of this book; That's why Paul writes it
That's why he addresses so many issues, so head on
B/c he desperately wants us to live as the church in the world, without the world in the
church

So given all the striking similarities, this is not some irrelevant, barely-applicable,
maybe-there-are-some-nuggets-here-for-us kind of book
This is so *us*, it's scary
B/c the issues that don't apply right now, are but a hair's breadth away with only the
slightest loss of focus on our part

With all that in mind then . . .

Similarity #1 – They were a new church, and so are we (Acts 18:1-11)

That's similarity #1

In fact, at the time of Paul's writing, around AD54, the church in Corinth was about 4
years old – we're 5
And it was planted by Paul on a missionary journey (**map**)

I have a little map to help you see that, which I think is important . . .

B/c understanding the background of this church and how it got started, will help you
understand the issues as they unfold, and better apply them to your life

- So sometime around AD49, Paul left Jerusalem on his second missionary journey,
wanting to visit the churches he planted on his first
And his first stop was **Antioch** in Syria

And after preaching there for some time, he parted company with Barnabas, and took Silas
with him to the churches in Galatia
Which probably first included a stop at **Tarsus**, Paul's hometown

From there they went to **Derbe** where he met Timothy, who joined them on the journey
And then on to **Lystra**, then **Iconium**, and then probably **Antioch** of Pisidia
From Antioch, they traveled all the way to **Troas**, b/c Luke tells us in the book of Acts,
that they were prevented by the HS from preaching in the areas in between

And when they reached Troas, Paul had a vision/dream of a man from Macedonia saying,
“Come over to Macedonia and help us.” (Acts 16:9)
So they did, sailing immediately for **Philippi**, concluding that God had called them to
preach the gospel *there* (16:10)

Which they did – only to be beaten, thrown in prison, and put in stocks
That's when Paul and Silas you might recall, were praying and singing hymns about
midnight, and a great earthquake struck, providing for their miraculous release
But not before they led the jailer and his household to the Lord

From there, they continued on to **Thessalonica**, where Paul preached in the synagogue for
only 3 weeks . . .
When he was forced to flee under the cover of darkness, due to the uproar that followed
That took them to **Berea**, where he finally encountered ready hearts and eager minds . . .
And then on to **Athens** by himself

While there, he addressed the blatant idolatry and false gods they worshipped
And then finally sailed to **Corinth**
And that's where I'd like to pick the story up in Acts 18:1-11,18

- *Pontus* – northern Turkey
Claudius was the emperor of Rome, and expelled the Jews in AD49 b/c of disturbances
in a synagogue over guess who – Jesus
We don't know for sure if Aquila and Priscilla were already believers, but given their
hospitality toward Paul, it's likely they were
Reviled – insulted, berated, disparaged

From March of AD50 to Sept of 51 – dates that are based on references to Gallio in extra-
biblical sources . . .

During that 18 month stretch, Paul preached and taught the word of God among the
Corinthians – first in a Jewish synagogue, and then in a Gentile home
Kind of like first in a high school, and then in a retail store – all unlikely places . . .
But the Bible says that many believed and were baptized (18:8b) – striking similarities

Here's the thing – then, as now, it didn't matter where Paul preached, just that the hearts
of those who heard were soft; And when they were, the church was born
The very thing that happened here, and continues to happen all over the world

- But notice from this passage and Paul’s journey – 3 things must be true in order for a church to get off the ground (**Re: Church Planting**)
 - (A) **The word of God must be faithfully preached**, despite the opposition
 - (B) **It must be heard and received by soft hearts**
 - (C) **God must be in it** – if the HS hasn’t gone ahead, it doesn’t matter what you do

That’s why I can take no credit for *our* church, and neither could Paul for the church in Corinth

Yes, he was faithful to preach the word when others weren’t, and so am I
 But he was also faithful in Thessalonica, and had to flee out of fear for his life
 And in Philippi, but was thrown in prison

What’s the difference? Soft hearts

In order for a *church* to be planted and flourish, the preached word must be met by hearts and minds eager to hear

I could preach ‘til I’m blue in the face, and sometimes do, but if you reject it (which sometimes *you* do), it’s all for naught

It must be met with soft hearts

And that’s not just in week 1 and week 2, or year 1 and year 2 – but always and ongoing
 Which means that our church, as with any church – is only 1 week away from stagnation
 If u stop listening, or if your heart becomes hard – we’re sunk; it’s only a matter of time

- The word of God must be faithfully preached, it must be heard and received by soft hearts, and most importantly – God must be in it
 If he’s not in it, don’t bother
 Like when Paul wanted to preach in Asia and Bythia on his way to Troas, but couldn’t and wouldn’t b/c the HS prevented him

What that looked like, we don’t know

Maybe it was a strong feeling; Maybe it was a dream . . .

Maybe it was the sense of Paul’s companions . . .

Maybe it was circumstances like travel, or a lack of support, or weather, or any number of other obstacles they might have paid attention to

The bottom line is that God wasn’t in it in *those* places at *that* time, so he didn’t go
 But he was in Corinth, so he did

And he kept on with the assurance from the Lord in v10, that he was *with* him, and had *many* in that city who were his people

Which I take to mean – many who were his, but had not yet crossed over

So God would protect Paul until they heard, and did

Whatever the case, God was clearly in it, and it flourished

Take any one of those criteria away – faithful preaching, soft hearts, and God’s will . . .

And the church will not happen

Or if it does, it will be on your own strength, and by your own clever devices

And only the egotistical want that

- Now, you might be thinking – “Ya, but if God’s in it, surely there will be soft hearts”
 “So doesn’t that make the second criteria a moot point?”

Not necessarily; Take Jeremiah for example, in the OT

He preached and preached and preached b/c God *told* him to, with nothing to show for it
 Was he wrong? Not at all

B/c by virtue of doing what he was told, God was in it

Even *Jesus* preached to people with hard hearts, from whom there was no following

Some even *left* him b/c of his teachings

And certainly God was in *his* work

- The point is – just b/c God’s in it, doesn’t mean there will be soft hearts
 Sometimes in God’s design, a church or a following is not the intended outcome
 Sometimes he simply wants you to be obedient, no matter what the outcome
 Who knows, he may want to use *your* perseverance to spur *others* on, for whom it *is* the intended outcome

But every now and then, he brings it all together, to result in a church like Corinth, and a church like ours*****

- I tell you this not b/c you’re all pastors who are going to plant churches . . .
 But b/c you’re a part of a church who, Lord willing, will
 Who *will* send out pastors, and will partner with others like Al & Debbie Blake in St. Vincent, to plant churches

And when we do, I want to make sure our expectations as a church, are realistic and biblical – according to Paul’s example

- When you look at it that way, it makes the similarities of 1 Cor even more striking
 Which is further reason to pay attention to the issues of *their* day, in order to get them right in ours