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Success as a city saint

The fishy smell of the sea. The sailor's curse. The creak of rigging. We disembark. Wending our way through milling crowds, mounds of fish, bales of goods, and stepping over nondescript slime, we follow Lechaion Road from this port on the Gulf of Corinth south into the city proper. We see looming on the city's southern edge the most conspicuous landmark in Corinth. Soaring 1,886 feet is the acropolis crowned by the Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, where 1,000 female prostitutes serve worshippers. Undoubtedly, this contributes to Corinth's reputation for immorality. Strabo, the geographer, ascribed the prosperity of the city to this very feature. Aristophanes used the apparently mainstream term "corinthianize" meaning to practice immorality.

The road spews us and hoards of humanity into the Agora, the largest in the Roman Empire. The smells of the docks behind us, new scents make the nose tingle. Shops, commercial booths, restaurants, and taverns surround the rectangular space. The latter are equipped with pits connected by underground channels fed by water from the fountain of Peirene (the city's major source of water) allowing them to cool wine for patrons.

The swirling colors. Cooking food. Fresh dung. Hawkers' cries. The grunt and sigh of trade. The leer, the sneer, the smile. A kaleidoscope of humanity. We bump and shuffle through the throngs.

Surrounding this marketplace square, the city proper covers an area of more than two square miles. A conservative estimate allows for at least

300,000 inhabitants. The city is less than 100 years old in the first century, having been destroyed under the Roman general Lucius Mummius in 146 B.C. When Julius Caesar rebuilt Corinth, the Roman character of the city was in evidence though a majority of the residents are Greek. We know a good number of Jews reside here because of the presence of a Synagogue. The population is mobile, made up of sailors, business people, government officials, people traveling in and out of the city with goods and materials. The social mobility and the huge trade along with religious prostitution serve as a force for corruption.

The city is a major junction between east and west by sea and north and south by land. Commerce, industry, and agriculture along with a large pottery industry and a bronze metalworks mean there is money to be made.

The Lerna-Asclepeum complex, a healing center in the northwest sector of the city, is dedicated to Asclepius, the god of healing. The complex contains the fountain of Lerna, a sanctuary dedicated to Asclepius, bathing, exercise, and dining facilities, and quarters for patients. It's a giant elaborate spa built around religious ritual practices.

It is a city of international reputation, commercial muscle, cultural sophistication, and utter depravity. This is Paul's Corinth. This is the metropolis he targets after Athens (Acts 18). How does a single missionary penetrate such a huge, intense concentration of spiritual darkness, corruption, and evil?

Paul is the ultimate urbanite, the quintessential city slicker. He spends his life in the chief cities of the Roman

Empire. He understands the city. He understands its systems of sin, its infrastructures of iniquity. He comprehends the metropolitan matrix of amoral value systems. He has winced at the foul breath of godless power.

This apostolic David fires the gospel from his Holy-Spirit-powered sling nailing the urban Goliath between the eyes.

In 2 Corinthians 10, you gain insight into this successful city saint. In his personal appeal (verse 1), he is affectionate and authoritative. He has not allowed city life or ministry to harden him, to callous his soul, or to beat him into mush. He didn't let the city desensitize him. He had God's heart. He didn't let the city intimidate him. He had God's strength. He didn't let the city corrupt him. He had God's truth. He had a spiritually mature disposition.

He understood the war and its battles (verses 2-4). He comprehended the spiritual nature of the fight and fought accordingly.

He knew what weapons to use for a successful fight. In Holy Spirit power, he skillfully wields the truth of the gospel. He sees the strongholds not as human institutions but as fortresses belonging to the realm of the will and the intellect, which can only be brought down under the force of God's truth (verse 5). And, God's truth is able!

Our entire culture now shudders in the grip of this strong power and mighty evil once contained in urban centers. Paul's success as a city saint, an urban evangelist, points the way to strength and success for all of us trying to live for Jesus and save souls in an evil world.