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Acts 18:1-18

"Alone in the Big City"

September 19, 2018

Let's open our Bibles tonight. We're continuing through the book of Acts, chapter 18:1.

And I think we have the map up here (on the screen). We have all of these maps; first, second, third trips of Paul and his missionary journeys, also his trip to Rome which we'll get later on in the book. If you don't have one, stop by the counter on the way out, or ask one of the ushers - they'll get you one.

Acts is a written narrative reported through the ministry of Dr. Luke who the Holy Spirit moved upon to write. It is a narrative of the first thirty years of the history of the church - the expansion, the growth. Its primary focus is upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of born-again believers and how God provided not only power to their lives but passion and drive and love for the lost. It is a book that, because it is so close to the nexus of the church, will tell us what kind of church the Lord would have us to be, what kind of believers He would like to use.

And so the gospel was first carried to the Jews. And really the first fifteen years of this thirty-year narrative covers that more than anything else. God's desire to reach all men, though, through the gospels, through His Son, was revealed very clearly when the Lord sent Peter miraculously to the house of Cornelius the centurion, where Peter shared the gospel in its simplest form, and the whole household was turned to Christ and filled with the Spirit. And it became very clear, very quickly, that the Lord wanted to save all men through the gospel.

At the same time that was going on with Peter, in Caesarea there were men from Cyprus and Cyrene who had cleared out, really, from Jerusalem because Stephen had been put to death. They traveled 300 miles north to Antioch in Syria (you can see it there on the map). It is the place from which the church would go forward into all of the world to preach the gospel, and it is really the center of the last fifteen chapters of the book of Acts in the sense that God wanted the message to go to all men. These men that went to Antioch preached to the Hellenists; they were Jews, for the most part, that practiced Greek or Roman tendencies. They weren't as religious in their practices as the people in Jerusalem might have been, and again, the gospel was there saving many. In fact, the big conflict, early on in

the book, is the conflict between the Jewish mind - "God's chosen us as His people" - and then seeing Gentiles get saved without becoming Jews - "And how's that possible? I thought we were the chosen people of God." And it was a stumbling block. It took a long time for people to embrace it. You can watch very carefully Peter having to learn that as well as others; some there in Jerusalem didn't embrace that so quickly. Barnabas, a guy that certainly didn't mind at all, was sent by the Jerusalem church 300 miles north to Antioch to see what was going on. He ministered, people got saved by the droves. He realized he couldn't handle the teaching aspect - that wasn't his gift. He went to find Saul who had been, really, out of the limelight and really away, maybe ten years or more, where we didn't even know where he might have been. He was in Tarsus and in those surrounding areas. He agreed to come to Antioch. He began to teach. They were there for a year, and then, as this body began to thrive, their vision was the mission field - the world - and they wanted to take the gospel to the world.

And so Paul takes three extended trips into the mission field with ever-increasing circles, and that is the majority of the last half of the book of Acts. And it is an amazing story of the grace of God and the power of God and the goodness of God to save. At every step, Paul met the Judaizers. The Judaizers were those who will not accept that Gentiles could come in at all, and many of them even rejected Christ. But they followed Paul wherever he went. They were a thorn in his side. The greatest difficulty for him didn't come from the world; it came from religious folks. But Paul continued on. In 46-47 A.D. - first missionary journey, two years, most of it in the Galatia area to the north; 50-55 A.D., six years or so, the second journey. All of these journeys, Paul went back to where he began and strengthened what was happening before going somewhere else. In the second journey, he spent most of his time in Europe. In the third and final journey that Paul took - pretty soon after the second one ended, from 55 or so to 57 A.D. - Paul would end up, for the most part, in Ephesus. The majority of his time was spent planting the church at Ephesus. So 1200 miles in the first trip, 2700 miles in the second, 2500 in the third. And then we've still got to get Paul to Jerusalem and off to prison in Rome before we finish the book. So a lot to look up and to learn.

Paul went on his first journey with Barnabas. He went on his second journey with Silas and Timothy and others. Luke joined them as well in Troas, there on the coast. He would be left in Philippi. And then, on the third journey, Silas just disappears in chapter 18. We don't hear from him anymore. We don't know what happened; we don't get much explanation. We can presume some things, but that's

not a good way to study. So we'll just say he doesn't seem to be around on that third trip, and we'll find five or six names of people who were with Paul on that third missionary journey, spending a lot of time in Ephesus.

So, we are in the second journey. So if you're new here, you can go to the archives and listen to all of the studies, catch up, do 'em all in one week - that'd be good. (Laughing) There're a lot of them (since we're in chapter 18). But on this second journey, and it's the longest journey - six years' worth, Paul and Silas go back to Galatia to all of the churches. Galatia is today almost all Turkey. Through trial and error, they figured out over maybe weeks or months that the Lord wanted them to go to Europe. They figured that out because they went as far as they could, and they finally ran into the Aegean Sea there at Troas (on the map), and then God called them over to Philippi. We are given (in chapter 16) three prominent people that got saved in Philippi, the ministry that began there: a wealthy Jewish businesswoman and her household, a demon-possessed girl delivered from these demons (how she had been used by others), and then a jailer and his family. Paul and Silas are arrested upon the complaint of that woman being delivered of a demon, and they were beaten and thrown in prison. It led to the conversion, obviously, of the jailer. When they found out Paul was a Roman and they shouldn't have beaten him, they gave him a lot of grace. And Paul gave them a lot; he said that he was leaving, but he knew what they had done, and I think he bought the church some time. When that happened, Paul and the boys left. Like I said, they left Dr. Luke there. They would pick him up again on the third missionary journey through, a couple years later; but Luke stays in Philippi, the first ministry place in Europe. They go 105 miles or so to Thessalonica, through a place called Amphipolis, through a place called Apollonia; they're about 30-35 miles each on the road. And they were only there for three weeks. They went to the synagogues, they shared the gospel. They were very bold and outspoken. A riot erupted. It was led by religious unbelievers. And the team had to go down the road for their own safety. They traveled 50 miles or so to Berea, where they found just the opposite - people that were willing to listen to the gospel, folks that were temperate in their response. They were studious, they were hungry. They wouldn't just buy what you told them, but they'd be willing to listen and be convinced; and Paul found great fruit there and, I think, a lot of satisfaction. We don't know how long he stayed there; we are not told. But eventually the people from Thessalonica came there, and they began to cause the same problems that they had in Thessalonica. And so the church, or the believers that were there at the time, thought it was best to get rid of Paul. "Let's send Paul 20 miles down to the coast. Let's put him on a

boat." And Paul would travel 250 miles across the Aegean, there to Athens. He would send back word to his two buddies that he left behind - to Silas and to Timothy, "Please come as soon as you can." And he left them there to continue to minister to the young church in Berea. Which left Paul, for months, alone.

We looked at his ministry in Athens. You remember the story of him meeting the intellectuals and the philosophers up on Mars Hill. But he left that place with very little fruit, very little satisfaction, and pretty frustrated that every place he goes, he's beat up and left for dead; and if he's doing well, then someone finds him, and then the trouble starts all over again. And so he decides he's not going to stay in Athens; he's going to travel 50 more miles (you can see it on your map) to Corinth, which is where we join Paul tonight. He is discouraged, he is at his wits' end. He's by himself; that's not easy. And he needs some encouragement.

But Corinth is the filthiest place on the planet. And so if Paul thought Athens was bad, boy, this place was worse. Spurgeon wrote on his notes on Acts 18, "Through perseverance, the snail made it to the ark." And I thought that was a good quote. I heard a great quote last week; has nothing to do with the study, but I gotta tell you because I liked it. A guy was talking about fighting for what you want and what you need and what's right with the Lord, and he said, "You should fight like the third monkey at the door of the ark, and it's startin' to rain." (Laughing) And I thought, "That's great!" The third monkey. That means he's gotta get one of the two there off so he can stay. It has nothing to do with the study, but I...I share whatever I can. Nehemiah found halfway home discouraging. Maybe you do as well. We've been at this building thing with the drawings and all with the City (of Whittier) for almost two years; it can be discouraging. But we also believe God is in charge. So, every time you get discouraged, if you're going to complain, you've got to complain against God's oversight, and you can't do that. So here's Paul. He is called to persevere. His work is great. It is hardly ever easy in the Bible. Ultimately it's God's work in us. If the lesson of the first eighteen verses of chapter 18 had to be summarized, I would say that you should write across it, "It's too soon to quit." I don't know what you're doing, what God's called you to, but don't give up now because there is much to be done.

So we're going to look at the first eighteen verses of chapter 18. I'm gonna continue to try to do summaries until we get to the end of the book, but I think I'm gonna fall apart at some point. Verse 1, "After these things" (that was Paul's time in Athens) "Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a

certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers." Corinth is one of the most decadent places in the 1st century that you will find. I'm sure that Paul pulled in here on the boat and wondered if he'd arrived at the wrong planet. It was the political capital, for years, of Greece. It was destroyed in 146 B.C. by the Romans because they said the Greeks were rebelling; it was rebuilt in 46 A.D. by Julius Caesar. It is a unique place. We were there on the "Footsteps" tour with our church last year. It has ports on both sides of the land mass, so there's a west and an east side. It was the chief stop between Asia and Italy for those trade routes. It was a town, in the 1st century, of three-quarters of a million people. That's huge in 1st-century terms. It was a sailors' port. It was known as the Vanity Fair of the Roman Empire. There was no Roman town in the Empire that came close to the perversion and the wickedness that you'd find in Corinth. What happened in Corinth stayed in Corinth. On the Acrocorinth hill, there stood a temple to Venus. Venus is called, in Greek, Aphrodite; she is called Ashtaroth to the Phoenicians. (It's the same goddess). She was the goddess of sexuality. And every night, these thousands of prostitutes would come down from the temple into the city to lure men and women into worship of this pagan god in a very perverse manner. It was so bad that, in the vernacular, to "Corinthianize" meant to commit adultery or to fornicate; it's what the word means - the town named a sin. If you want to get a feel for what Paul saw when he landed, and we know (kind of) his mind set and how long he'd been on his own, read Romans 1 because Paul will write that book from here; and seeing the plethora of idolatry and the perversion of worship, it was more than Paul could handle. When later Paul wrote to the church here (1 Corinthians 2:1-5), let me read to you what he wrote in his first letter to the church that obviously doesn't exist yet because he's just arriving; but he wrote this, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." So Paul left Athens, where he tried to argue on an intellectual basis, "Well your own prophets have written," and he went, "That's not workin'. I gotta go back to preachin' Jesus. That's all I'm gonna do." And that's what he determined when he came here. That's the way he was gonna go about it; that's the place he was

gonna stay. So Paul was in trembling, in fear. He was broken, he was discouraged. He was certainly at the end of his rope. The road had been tough. The stays had been short. The response had been uneven. He was lonely, certainly, and it made it all the worse.

The rabbis used to teach their students in Judaism that every good rabbi should have a trade to fall back on. Paul was a tentmaker. He would weave goats' hairs together to make fabrics for tents. In fact, when we were in Ephesus and also in Corinth, we were shown places where, in the markets, the merchants would set up shop in the ruins. It's quite possible that we looked right into one of the places that Paul might have been working when he came to town. So he joins, as he comes to town and looks for work, two Jewish believers who hire him and give him a place to live. We are told in Romans 16:3 (again, this book written from here) - Paul will end the letter to the Romans (because that's where these folks will end up), "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." So they established some really good rapport, good relationship. There was a man and a wife who gave themselves over, if you will, to helping and supporting Paul. They would later go with Paul to Ephesus. They would host a church there in their own home. They would end up with the Romans. So we can't follow them completely, but we know a lot about them from what the Scriptures have to say.

We are told, notice in verse 2 here, that they had come here to Corinth because in Rome, Emperor Claudius (he came to power in 49 A.D.) gave an edict that all of the Jews would leave Rome completely. And for many years the Jews were not allowed to live in Rome. Aquila was from Pontus, we are told; that's a Roman province on the Black Sea. But he came here to start a new business. He was a believer. So was his wife. You need Christian businessmen. And he was one who put Jesus first. So he and his wife and Paul would work together every day, and they would spend their time making tents but yet being a witness on the job. Sometimes people wonder, "Well maybe I should be in full-time ministry." Well, you are. No matter where you go to work, you're in full-time ministry. You know that. We hire pastors here, and others, when the work is such that you really don't have time to do it well unless you can devote all of your time to it. But most churches when they start and there're a lot of things to be said for bivocational ministry until you get started, and we find Paul doing that a lot; he certainly didn't want to be a burden to anyone. So he was interested in serving, but he wanted very much to get the

word out. That was more important to him than anything else. It wasn't an easy life. Paul worked his tail off. I can't imagine the hours that he kept. But if you love the body and you want to be a shepherd and serve others, Paul's a pretty good example of that. And he oftentimes, like I said, supported himself. Now he wasn't against being supported. In fact, you can read in Galatians 6:6 that he said, "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches." So he talks a lot about the support of the church. Jesus said (Luke 10:7), "Stay in that house. Eat and drink there as they give you. A laborer is worthy of his hire. Just don't run from house to house." Paul said to the Thessalonians (where he was only at for 3 weeks), "You remember how I labored amongst you day and night. I don't want to be a burden to any of you while I preach to you the gospel of God. I just want to tell you the gospel. I don't want to be a burden." (1 Thessalonians 2:9). In fact, you might read 1 Corinthians 9 which is a really succinct kind of chapter about finances and the church and the laborer and the muzzling of the ox who treads out the grain. It's really good, and it'll give you Paul's heart on how he viewed this. But at least for now, he went to work, and he sought to work. His concern was not himself as much as the people that God loved. But remember Paul was really out. Right? He worked every day on Saturdays though he went to the synagogue. He went to minister to the people and especially to the Jews first - kind of his practice - to reach out to them. So he worked, in verse 3, with the tentmakers.

We read, in verse 4, "And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." To "reason" is the word "dialogue." It means to dispute with a purpose or to challenge people's positions, having an answer for them. The word "persuade," in Greek, means to prove. So he sought to provide both Jew and Gentile converts to Judaism a foundation for them believing in Christ. This wasn't a one-time message where you're gonna all get saved; this was more like, "I got to know you, and you get to know me, and let's talk about it and work through your questions until you come to where you believe in the Jesus that I know." And Paul took a very, I want to say not a backseat approach but I'll say that he took it very slowly. It could perhaps be, and I say it only because of what we read in the next couple of verses, that Paul was not willing to push anybody's buttons at this point to cause a fight. He'd been beat up so much and left alone for so long that he just figured he'd be as mellow as he could. Because we're going to read, in verse 5, that when his buddies finally do come to Corinth, Paul changes back to the old Paul, the in-your-face-preaching-to-you-until-you-won't-listen-anymore Paul. That was his method. But at least here, in verse 4, maybe he challenged them to study the prophecies of the Messiah, but he wasn't

confrontational. He sat back, it seems. He was able to go there every Sabbath. He didn't shut the door on himself. It is not the usual Paul, but it seemed to work in some manner, in the sense that he got to come back. I think if you go to work and you preach to somebody, and you get in their face, it might be your only conversation with them. If you can kind of challenge them in their beliefs, you might have lots of them and bring them along. So, I'm not saying one's better than the other, but the Lord certainly should lead you. And it seemed like Paul, for a while here, just kind of put the brakes on.

In verse 5, though, we read, "When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit," (stirred in his heart) "and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ." When the group came from Thessalonica (and again, we have letters that Paul wrote), Paul wrote in chapter 3:6-8 of 1 Thessalonians this about these men's arrival, "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you - therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord." That was Paul's heart. "Man, we're goin' through it, but just the good news that the church is doin' well is all that matters to me. I can handle anything if I know that there's fruit that will last." And so Timothy brought good news to Paul. We are told in 2 Corinthians 11:9 (this is the church that's being planted) that Paul said to them, "When I was with you, I didn't want to be a burden to you," (remember, he worked as a tentmaker) "but what I lacked the brethren from Macedonia supplied." So it does seem like Paul's friends, Timothy and Silas, came bearing some financial help for Paul, and it could very well be, although we can't be certain, that it gave Paul the opportunity to make less tents and preach a little longer; because we find him eventually being able to set up at a home and seemed to do more regular teaching than he might have done just that once on a Saturday. But he mentions that devotion. So their arrival gave Paul a huge boost, "compelled by the Spirit." "Consumed" is the word. Right? Held to one concern. He's like an inflated balloon. He wanted to share.

I think that if you are prone to be a little hesitant in ministry, you're not good at speakin' up, and it makes you uncomfortable, or you're not sure you're going to be able to answer the question someone asks, hang around with somebody that does. Go together. There's something about ministry together. It works in a bad sense when a bunch of people get together and do the wrong thing; but it works in a good sense as well. And so it certainly did help Paul.

Notice in verse 5 here that he comes more forcefully to the synagogue. Now he clearly testifies, tells it out loud. "Jesus, He's the Messiah." He might have been beatin' around the bush before, but he's not doin' that anymore.

Verse 6 tells us, "But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.' " Their reaction to Paul's boldness was swift, it was blasphemous. They opposed themselves. In fact, verse 6 talks about "opposed him," but it's in the middle voice; so it literally means in opposing him, they opposed themselves. A middle voice reflects the words that you're speaking in Greek. So, they're opposing Paul, but really the Lord says in not listening to the good news, they're their own worst enemy, if you will. Paul said the same thing in that 2 Timothy 2 letter, where he said to Timothy, "Avoid the foolish questions of men and all. Be temperate, don't strive. Maybe God will give them repentance to know the truth, and they'll be brought to their senses, and they'll escape the snare of the devil who's taken them captive at their own will" (verses 23-26). Paul gave them the same advice. You've got to kind of be ready to give answers. But notice his reaction. I think with what happened in Thessalonica, what happened in Berea, what happened in Athens and now in Corinth that Paul had had enough. You know? They'd been given opportunities time and again to believe, and Paul just figures, "I can't do it," and he shakes his garment out, and he says, "Your blood be upon your own head." The words out of Ezekiel (33:4-5), the prophet, mean, "You're responsible for your own destiny. You're responsible for what you know." It's a phrase that the spies used with Rahab, you might remember, when they said (Joshua 2:18-19), "If you'll do these things and tie this out the window, then you'll be fine. And whoever is in that house with you will be saved. But if you don't do it, then your blood be upon your own head. That's gonna be your responsibility." So Paul had had it. He just figured this wasn't a place to be. He loved the people; he was one of them. But he knew that his calling was ultimately to the Gentiles. And so, "You're gonna have to answer for it." He was frustrated, and he was tired of the opposition, I think, more than anything else.

Which brings us to verse 7, where we read, "And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshipped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue." (Oh, that's helpful). "Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized." So Paul moves next door to Justus' home; not exactly a way to avoid conflict. I may have told you this story

before, but when we were in Holland a few years ago, the Church of Satan was the largest church downtown. It had more practicing Satanists than everybody else. So Youth With A Mission got the good idea to plant a coffee shop next door to the place. So when these folks would come out of their church services, they would come in and get coffees, and they'd have all their folks sittin' around, sharing. They stayed there for three years; in three years, the Church of Satan closed in Amsterdam. Closed. Because everyone either got saved or just left. And the Lord used them to plant them next door. And I remember talking to the fellow who had come to that idea, and he was so excited that the Lord had used him - just in friendship evangelism over a cup of coffee. So, Paul moved next door. He would write to the Romans, and again from this city, "If there were any means I could use to provoke my own people, my flesh and blood, that some of them could be saved, I would do that. I just want to provoke them to listen and believe" (Romans 11:14). Well, he did. He moved right next door to the synagogue. They would go in, and then he'd be next door having Bible studies. Pretty interesting setup. Pretty bold of Paul, certainly. And Justus' family name might have been (if you're taking notes) Gaius. In Romans 16:23, Paul will write, "Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you." So it could very well be that Paul met in Justus' home, and that would have been his family name (and you can kind of keep that in the back of your mind). If that's so, it is also one of the only names that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 1:14 as having baptized that family. So the connections are all there in the letters, certainly. In any event, God began to move in very unmistakable ways.

Notice, in verse 8, that the result was even the rabbi next door got saved; so did his family. And then the Corinthians began to come and listen and believe, and they had baptisms. There were very few people baptized by Paul, but there was a lot of stir going on; and I don't doubt that Paul wondered if, "Man, what's the next problem here?" Notice that many of the Corinthians, the fornicators, the perverse in the town - they heard about Jesus, and they came and were baptized. And I should just point out to you, since we're going through it, Paul didn't baptize many folks because, for one thing, it became a status symbol. "Have you been baptized by Paul or not?" Second of all, he didn't believe it was a part of the gospel. In fact, he said very clearly in his 1 Corinthians letter, "God didn't call me to baptize. He called me to preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 1:17). Everywhere in the Bible, baptism, for the believer, is an obedient after-event; obedience to the Word of God. So there are people that will teach you that you have to be baptized to be saved; they have not bothered to read their Bibles. Paul categorized baptism as part of church life and separated the gospel from it. So I believe if Paul truly

believed you had to be baptized to be saved, you will not read in 1 Corinthians 1:14, "I baptized this guy and that guy and everybody else; I don't even know who they were." I think he'd have been baptizing 24 hours a day because that's where his heart was, was to see people get saved. So, get yourself situated here. There's a synagogue next door. Every week the church next door is growing while the synagogue seems to be shrinking. The prostitutes are coming. The affluent are coming. The religious idolaters are coming. Jewish leaders are coming. Their initial response might have been anger, but you know how that goes; it won't be long before disdain becomes violent. Paul had had that every place he had stopped. And so I think it was heavy on Paul's heart as they began to grow again to go, "Oh, man, I'm gonna get whooped here pretty soon." He's probably duckin' at shadows yet. Every knock at the door is a mob about to drag him out of town and kill him. Because that's all he knows. And that first loneliness and discouragement, now blessing and fear.

Which is why we read, in verse 9, "Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.' And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." One night, the Lord gave Paul a vision. It was perfectly timed. It was greatly needed. This won't be the last time Jesus comes to talk to Paul. He'll have a meeting with him in Acts 23 in Jerusalem, in Acts 27 on a boat on the way to Rome. But you can always tell what the Lord is dealing with by what He says. He says to Paul, first thing, "Don't be afraid." What would that tell you? That Paul was afraid. Right? That he was worried about what was coming next. In fact, he wrote that in 1 Corinthians 2:3, "I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling." He was. As revival began, I think Paul recalled Lystra and Philippi and others, and there'd been some gains but at great personal expense. If you ever read the gospel and think of Paul as a super-saint, I would tell you he's not. He hurt like you do. He struggled like we do. He was fearful. He'd flinch, too, once he got hit a few times, and so would you. But he's a brave guy, and he's looking for revival. He loves it and hates it all at the same time, if that makes any sense. He couldn't be happier with all the people that are coming. He's totally fearful that that's going to bring with them another round of tremendous suffering. And yet he needed to hear from Jesus, and Jesus came and said to him, "Don't be afraid." "Why not?" "A - I'm with you." The surest defense against fear is the awareness of the presence of God. If the Lord is with you, what do you have to fear? When I was a little kid, and I'd go places with my dad, even in the dark I wasn't afraid.

If my dad wasn't there, I'd be afraid of the closet in my bedroom. "What's in there? It's noisy. Probably a monster." (Pastor Jack says this in a whiny tone) When dad was around, I'd go right to sleep. I didn't care. Dad would have to deal with the monster. Same thing with this. Right? The presence of God. David learned it fairly quickly. He was able to say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me" (Psalm 23:4). Know that tonight. The Lord is with you. Paul would write, as he learned that lesson, again to the Romans (which he wrote from Corinth), "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31b). He learned that here in Corinth. "If God is with us, who can be against us?" So, "I'm with you. No one will hurt you." God promises Paul divine protection in this city. Now He didn't promise him that in every city, as we are well aware of. Sometimes God brings you through the trials. Sometimes He delivers you from them. Now I would just vote I want to be delivered from all of them. I don't want to go through any of 'em. I don't want it to rain. "Oh, I've seen the dark".....no, I don't need any of that. I want sunshine and downhill and wind at my back and blessing. It doesn't always happen that way. But at least in this case, for this year and a half, Paul had a word from the Lord that things were going to go well. And Paul might have been getting paranoid or timid. "Paul, don't be afraid." Second of all, "Speak up, man. Tell everyone. I know that you're gonna see Just tell everyone. I'll protect you. Shoot off your mouth. I'll take care of you." Pretty cool word of prophecy. And then He says this to him, "I have many people in this city." I just love.....I underline that in my Bible every time I see it. I keep underlining it. "I have many people in this city." I love the fact that the Lord is able to look at Corinth, a bunch of unsaved perverts, and say of them, "They're mine. I'm comin' after them." That God saw the city far differently than Paul would have with his own two eyes; those people that at night sat in the bars or were with the prostitutes on the hill, were out partying and struggling and straying - the Lord saw them as His own. Paul would write to Timothy in his last letter to Timothy, in chapter 2:19, "This is one thing that you can know, this is the solid foundation upon which God stands, 'The Lord knows those who are His.'" God has an eye on those that are gonna come. That's where His heart is. "I've chosen you in Him before the foundation of the world." That's what Paul would write to the Ephesians (1:4). So, Paul was given an assurance by the Lord that there was much work to be done. Athens, the place he came from, was pretty poor soil; the intellectuals were there. But here in the filth capital of the world, they were hungry, lonely, disillusioned by the worldly pleasure; they were lost.

How do you suppose God will reach our city? Through you and me. The gangs, the drugs, the punks. Just the criminals. Do you see them when you go to the store as future children of God? Do you go, "Oh, that guy could be saved"? Or do you go, "Ahhh, get away from that guy! He's scary!" Should they be avoided, or should we reach out? I believe that God has lots of people in this city that want to be saved, and I think the Lord would say to you and me, "Go speak, don't be silent. I have a lot of people I want to reach." And for better or worse, His chosen method of reaching them is you and I. And you might say to yourself, "Oh, man, I wish it wasn't me." "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace.' " That's in the Romans letter, too (Romans 10:14-15). And Paul wrote that from here as well. He learned a lot here; things that gripped his heart at a time when he was open to hear whatever God had to say. So, rather than looking around and seeing all the failures of men and the sinfulness of men - and Paul could have looked out the window and went, "Man, this is a gross town" - he looked out and went, "These are people God wants to reach," and he put himself in that position to do it. I'll say this to you. You will never know what God can do with you until you open up your mouth and share God's Word with someone. It'll blow your mind what He'll do and how people get saved. It's just ridiculous. "You got saved in that 5-minute conversation?" "Now I see the light." And you'll be high-fivin' Jesus all the way home.

Verse 11 says for eighteen months Paul was here teaching the Word of God. He was encouraged, invigorated. He was on fire. He was strengthened. God's way to reach a city that is lost is through the teaching and through the preaching of His Word. These Gentiles, for the most part, had no biblical background whatsoever; they were absolutely idolaters. They knew nothing else. And yet how do they get reached? The ultimate new believer class - just teach the Bible. It works. It works. With just a word from the Lord, Paul presses on with great confidence, even doing what he had not done up to this point. He stayed in one place for a year and a half (that was unheard of), all because he'd heard from Jesus and was willing to do the work. I like that. There's a Scripture in Isaiah 7, where King Ahaz is being threatened by an invasion. And the LORD comes to King Ahaz, and He said, "If you'll trust Me, I'll tell you one thing. Their plans will not stand, and their counsel will not come to pass." That was all He said to him. "You just trust Me. Whatever they're up to is not going to work." Unfortunately, Ahaz turned away in

fear, but the LORD protected them by His Word anyway. Our response to the promises of God has no effect on the outcome of the battle. Let me say that again. Our response to the promises of God has no effect on the outcome of the battle. But it'll have a great effect on whether you become a vessel through whom God can work or not. Notice in verse 11, eighteen months in Corinth. Write this down or try to remember - in those eighteen months, Paul wrote from here two letters to the Thessalonians, a letter to the Romans (where there was already a church established), a letter to the Hebrews, and then, soon after this, 1 and 2 Corinthians (which you may want to go read in light of what you have read here tonight - so you know a little bit about it; that'll be your extra credit; turn in your homework before the study, and we'll give you stars). So all of that coming from this time, eighteen months. Right? Two Thessalonian letters, Romans, Hebrews and then, as soon as he leaves, two letters to the Corinthians as well; and they needed it.

Well, one little section to go before we call it a night. Verse 12, "When Gallio was proconsul" (or the governor) "of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, 'This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.' And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters.' And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things." Gallio comes to power while Paul is here for eighteen months. Remember God had said, "No one's gonna hurt you." Gallio had great connections in Rome; he was the brother of Seneca, if you know anything about Greek history. He was Nero's teacher or tutor. Gallio was put in charge of Achaia in 51 A.D. as proconsul, according to history. His appointment prompted the Jews who already hated Paul to try to make a political and kind of corporate move against him by going after a new governor who wanted to put his best foot forward and complained immediately about Paul. And they wanted to take legal action to stop the spread of Christianity. They hoped a new governor would act quickly and decisively to make a good impression on Rome. However, from what we read, they calculated wrongly because, notice, when Paul was about to speak for himself (and he'd been in this position before), the Lord moved upon this proconsul's heart in such a way that Paul didn't have to say a thing. Remember what the Lord said? "I've got your back. No one's gonna hurt you here."

So when he began to speak, instead Gallio spoke up. I love how God's in charge. "Paul, just sit back and watch this." Gallio saw this action as Jewish jealousy, internal dispute, and he threw it out of court. The Greeks, seeing how these Jews turned against others, (and especially the believing Greeks) came and they lashed out at the Jews with their own brand of wickedness. They, emboldened by the court, rioted, took this rabbi who had replaced Crispus, apparently, as the ruler, and they beat him, and the courts didn't do anything about it. It's kind of like, "Yeah, you guys are on your own." Now, it could be this fellow, Sosthenes, that was beaten later comes around. Because we do have at least one place - 1 Corinthians 1:1 (again written to this church) - where Paul greets "Sosthenes our brother in the Lord." I don't know if it was a common name or not, but there's at least one guy that we can trace from here to 1 Corinthians where Paul opens his letter to them and says, "Hey, our brother says hello to you." So maybe he got beat right into the kingdom. I don't know. (Laughing)

Of the eighteen months that Paul was here, this incident seems to have taken place in the first eight months or so. Paul stayed another year here, this time a Roman ruler protecting him. By the way, just as a side note, in the book of Acts, you will never see the Roman government persecuting the church. Ever. There is no persecution from the Roman government. Sometimes they'd vindicate you, as they did here, as they did in Philippi, and as they will later on in Ephesus. The Romans tend to protect the church much more so than the religious folks around them.

So, we conclude tonight. We see a glorious work in Corinth. Paul is back on track. Paul is refreshed. He is encouraged. He's determined to do what God has said. He's aware of God's presence. And I guess that's how you should leave church. Be encouraged. Be encouraged by the fact that even when the laborers are few, when there are hardships, that nothing spiritually accomplished - you don't find much of it in the Bible as an easy work. But God is with you as He was with Paul. If He is for you, who can be against you? Amen? (Congregation says "Amen").

Next week we will take the road with Paul to Ephesus. We're gonna end the second missionary journey of Paul next week and immediately begin the third missionary journey. All in three verses. No. We'll go to the end of the chapter, at least.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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