

A Study of the Book of Acts
Sermon # 33

"It Is Always Too Soon To Quit!"

Acts 18:1-17

"A man was shoveling snow from his driveway when two boys carrying snow shovels approached him. "Can we shovel your snow mister?" one of them asked. "Only two dollars!" Puzzled the man replied, "Can't you see that I'm doing it myself." "Sure," said one of the enterprising young men, "that's why we asked. We get most of our business from people who are half through and feel like quitting." [Warren Wiersbe. Be Daring. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1989) p. 56].

Well, that describes most of us at one time or another, we feel like giving up. Paul would later write to the same group that he is ministering to in this chapter in his first letter to the Corinthians saying, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58). But Paul did not feel that way when he first arrived in Corinth.

After he left Athens Paul went to Corinth. Verse one says, *“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.”* Corinth was a commercial center located on a narrow land bridge that connected the southern part of Greece; the Peloponnesus- with the northern part of Greece. This land bridge is only 4-7 miles wide. All commercial land traffic going between northern and southern Greece had to go through Corinth. In a similar fashion all sea traffic had to pass through Corinth; as Corinth had ports on both the eastern and western sides of the land bridge (Cenchrea on the east and Lechaemum on the west). The smaller boats would actually be skidded across the isthmus. Larger boats would be off loaded, the goods carried across, and reloaded on boats waiting on the other side (in 1893 a canal was cut). This was done because sailing around the tip of Greece was considered too dangerous in those days. At the time of Paul’s arrival the city would have been large and prosperous.

One of the most distinguishing features of the city was the Temple of Aphrodite, located on the hill overlooking the city. Aphrodite (or Venus as she was called by the Romans) was the goddess of love. There were about 1,000 temple prostitutes associated with this temple who entered the city each evening to ply their trade. One worshipped the goddess of love by having sexual relations with one of these prostitutes. Immoral-

ity in Corinth was so well known that to say to one who did not live in Corinth that they were a Corinthian, was an insult and a charge of sexual immorality. There was no city in the Roman Empire that was more corrupt

Note Three Things About Paul's Time In Corinth.

First, The Discouragement Of Paul. (18:1)

I tend to believe that when Paul arrived in Corinth that he was depressed and discouraged. When confronted with the wickedness of this city he must have felt almost overwhelmed. Some have even suggested that Romans 1:26-28 are a description of what he saw in Corinth. He wrote, "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. (27) Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in them-selves the penalty of their error which was due. (28) And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;" Every depraved thing that the imagination of man could come up with Paul saw in Corinth.

Not only is Paul overwhelmed with immorality of Corinth; he is very much alone. Paul had left all of his

co-workers, Silas and Timothy behind. He in Corinth he faced the challenge of presenting the gospel to an entire city with a population of around, 250,000 people. He was justifiably overwhelmed.

Once in Corinth an additional difficulty had to be faced, he did not have any funds. One of the first things we are told, in verse two and three is that Paul met 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. (3) So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.”

Paul teams up with Aquila and Priscilla, in their tent making business in order to support himself. In missionary circles today we still call any missionary who support themselves on the field by working in the local economy as “tent making.”

In verse four we find that Paul, “reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.” It would appear the Paul because he worked full time as a tent-maker had to limit his ministry to what he could do on the Sabbath.

In verse five as Paul testified “testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.” That opposition soon began to arise. Paul must have thought to himself, “Oh, no I recognize the pattern. It is starting all over again.

First they will stir up the people against me, then I will be dragged into court. After that I will be beat and thrown into jail. I have had enough of that. I quit!”

If Paul had fears like that he was just reason, because the rest of the story tells us that this is exactly what the people tried to do. In verse six, we are told, ***“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.”***

Paul probably had a lot of good reasons to be discouraged. We today may have good reasons to be discouraged. But just when Paul was the most discouraged, God intervened in several ways to encourage him.

Secondly, The Faithfulness of God. (18:2-8)

Three ways that God encouraged Paul.

- **God Sent Him Friends To Help. (vv. 2-3)**

Aquila and Priscilla were a great encouragement to the apostle. In the final chapter of Romans Paul says that they are ***“fellow workers in Christ Jesus,”*** and that they have ***“risked their lives”*** for him (16:3). They were close friends and a great source of strength.

God also brought Silas and Timothy back into his life. Paul was no longer alone. God surrounded him with a strong force of faithful people. The Lord seldom solves

the problem of discouragement in the lives of believers without the using His people that we are loved by Him through them.

- **God Sent Him Financial Support. (18:5)**

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia they brought two things with them – good news of the Thessalonians –that their faith and love were standing strong – (1 Thess. 3:6-10) and financial help from the Macedonian churches (2 Cor. 11:9, Phil. 4:14-15). It was this financial gift which allows Paul to give up tent making concentrate on preaching and teaching full time.

- **God Blessed Him With Fruit In The Work. (18:7-8)**

“And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. (8) “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.”

Although he may have had little initial success in synagogue at Corinth, God began to give him fruit for his efforts. It must have been a record day when Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue came to faith in Christ. It had been a slow start. But now the word of God was being to take effect. People were beginning to place their faith in Christ, not large numbers but a few at a time.

Third, The Communication from God. (18:9-11)

Just when Paul needed it, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and encouraged him. *“Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; (10) for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” (11) And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”* (18:9-11) This is one of six visions recorded in the book of Acts that Paul received (the others are 9:12, 16:9-10, 22:17-21, 23:11, 27:23-24) and all of them occur at critical moments in his ministry.

The Lord appeared to Paul in a vision and told him not to stop being afraid. Paul later wrote about this time of fear as he came to Corinth in 1 Corinthians 2:3 saying, *“I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.”* And in 2 Corinthians 1:8 he wrote, *“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.”*

Why would Paul be afraid? I suspect that from Paul's perspective the immediate future seemed quite predictable, soon there would be a riot and then he would be beaten. Paul was worrying about things that had not yet happened, like we all do from time to time.

“Today if you visit Thomas Carlyle’s famous home in London, they will show you an almost soundproof chamber that Carlyle had built so the noise of the street could be shut out and he could work in silence. One of his neighbors, however, kept a rooster that several times in the night and in the early morning gave way to vigorous self-expression. When Carlyle protested to the owner of the rooster, the man pointed out to him that the rooster crowed only three times in the night, and after that all could that be such a terrible annoyance. ‘But,’ Carlyle said to him, ‘if you only knew what I suffer waiting for that rooster to crow.’” [Lloyd John Ogilve.

Drumbeat of Love. (Waco, Texas: Word, 1976.) p. 231]

“When Lincoln was on his way to Washington to be inaugurated, he spent some time in New York with Horace Greeley and told him an anecdote which was meant to be an answer to the question which everybody was asking him: Are we really going to have a Civil War? In his circuit riding days Lincoln and his companions, riding to the next session of court, had crossed many swollen rivers. But the Fox River was still ahead of them; and they said to one another. ‘If these streams give us so much trouble, how shall we get over the Fox River.’”

When darkness fell, they stopped for the night at a log tavern, where they fell in with the Methodist presiding elder of the district who rode through the

country in all kinds of weather and knew all about the Fox River. They gathered about him and asked him about the present state of the river, "Oh yes," he replied, "I know all about the Fox River. I have crossed it often and understand it well. But I have one fixed rule with regard to Fox River – I never cross it until I reach it."

[Paul Lee Tan. Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations. (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Pub., 1984) # 7575]

Many of us are experts at borrowing trouble. So when we worry we go through a thousand problems that we think we might go through but most of which we probably never will.

We in America have very little to fear about actually being beat up for proclaiming our faith. The most we will probably face is social shunning, someone will think that we are some kind of a fanatic. But this fear is often enough to keep us from boldly defending our faith. He tells Paul to not stop speaking, just keep on ministering. Do not allow fear to keep you silent.

This the Lord did by reassuring Paul of three things.

- The Lord Confirmed His **Presence** - "I am with You" - You Are Not Alone.

Literally he says, "**For I myself will be with you.**" This wonderful phrase by Jesus, "**I am**" in the Greek is the same (**ego eimi**) that resounds throughout the New Testament. It is powerful phrase that Jesus

uttered each time he issued one of the “**I AM**” statements. Jesus said, “**I AM** the way the truth and the life,” “**I AM** the bread of life,” “**I AM** the light of the world.” When we understand that, “**I AM** with you” is marvelous reassurance.

It is the same reassurance that God gave Joshua in Deut. 31:6, “**Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.**”

The prophet Isaiah says, “**Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.**” (Isa. 41:10)

The Psalmist David promises, “**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**” (Psalm 23:4)

The writer of Hebrews attests, “**He Himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.**” (Hebrews 13:5)

We need to be reminded from time to time to keep our eyes riveted on the Lord and not on the perplexities of life. We cannot accurately analyze our problems without a sense of His presence.

- The Lord Confirmed His **Protection** - *“no man will attack you to harm you.”*

This was not a general promise that applied to all situations, but rather that no hurt would come to Paul in Corinth. He has suffered in the past and he would suffer again in the future, but for now God promised His protection.

The Jews did make a united attempt against Paul and brought him into the court (Acts 18:12). They tried to hurt him but they failed. Gallio was the proconsul in Corinth. He was a wise administrator and he refused to be drawn into a matter that was not under his civil jurisdiction. So he wisely threw the case out of court.

- The Lord Confirmed His **Purpose** - *“I have many people in this city.”* - Your Work Will Not Be In Vain.

*Paul is told, “**Don’t give up there are people who have not yet heard.**” These words of course are spoken to Paul but they have application to us today. We cannot quit. There is too much at stake. There are still those who have not heard.*

*It was the fulfilled promises that he received in Corinth that allowed him to later write in 1Corinthians 15:58 “**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**”*

The promise of verse ten, that “no one will attack you to hurt you,” is born out in his trial before Gallio. When eventually Paul was dragged before the authorities, but this time things would turn out differently. In verses 12-17 we are told, “When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, (13) saying, “This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” (14) 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. (15) 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.” (16) And he drove them from the judgment seat.”(17) 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.”

The proconsul quickly saw through all the verbal smoke screen this was not an issue of an application of Roman law but the interpretation of Jewish religion and he refused to hear it and dismissed the case.

Crispus became a Christian so he was no longer ruler of the synagogue. Sosthenes took his place and led in the attack against Paul. This went so badly that the whole thing was thrown out of court, when this happen his own people beat him up. Apparently this did a lot of

good. Before you jump to an incorrect conclusion turn to 1 Corinthians 1:1, “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,” Apparently Sosthenes became a believer himself, although I have never considered beating as a method of evangelism, it apparently worked in this case.

Because of the encouragement that he had received he remained in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching the word of God and discipling the new converts.

Conclusion

Somehow it helps me to know that a great apostle like the Apostle Paul could be discouraged and even afraid. There may be hope for me then. Even the Apostle Paul needed to be reassured that he was in the protective grace of God. But whatever this world may do to us, there is nothing that can change our eternal destiny.

Even the Apostle Paul needed to know that he was not alone. As great a man as he was he still needed other people. He needed to know that he was not in the fight alone. In the future you may need the encouragement of other believers or you may be a position to be an encouragement to someone who needs it.

“We cannot take a text like this and simply transfer it to ourselves, as if God is saying the identical thing to us: Nobody will ever attack you; nobody will harm you;However, I cannot help but think that if God has places us in a particular place, it is because he has a work for us to do there, and for that very reason we should be encouraged and stay on and do it to the best of our ability....Our job is to keep on keeping on, knowing that God is with us.” [James Montgomery Boice. p. 310]

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(1 Cor. 2:3, 2 Cor. 1:8) - Romans 1:26-28

Second, The Faithfulness of God. (18:2-8)

- *God Sent Him Friends To Help. (vv. 2-3)*
- *God Sent Him Financial Support.*
- *God Blessed Him With Fruit In The Work. (18:7-8)*

Third, The Comfort of God. (18:9-11)

- *The Lord Confirmed His Presence – "I am with you"
Joshua – (Deut. 31:6)
(Isa. 41:10, Psalm 23:4, Hebrews 13:5-6)*
- *The Lord Confirmed His Protection – "No man will
attack you in order to harm you."*
- *The Lord Confirmed His Purpose – "for I have many
people in this city." (1Cor. 15:58)*

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