

WORSHIP SERVICE - 11.2.2025

PART 39 - DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR I AM WITH YOU

I. INTRODUCTION

- Have you ever had one of those days where you're just done?
- When your best effort seems wasted, your prayers feel unheard, and your courage is gone?
- You're not alone in that. The Apostle Paul knew that feeling.
- In fact, when he arrived in Corinth, he was burned out, bruised, and broken.
- Paul came to this spiritually dark city alone, weary, and trembling with fear.
- But here's the heartbeat of the passage we will look at today, the story of Paul in Corinth is not a story of human resolve, but a testimony to the absolute, unwavering faithfulness of our God.
- Even when we are weak and fearful, God is faithfully at work: providing, empowering, protecting and preserving his people so that the gospel advances.

Acts 18:1-17

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, 3 and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

5 When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. 6 And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." 7 And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. 8 Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. 9 And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." 11 And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

12 But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, 13 saying, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law." 14 But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your

complaint. 15 But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.” 16 And he drove them from the tribunal. 17 And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

II. GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN OUR PARTNERSHIPS

- After Paul's battle with the philosophers of Athens, he travels about a day's journey to the cosmopolitan port city of Corinth. A commercial hub of the empire.
- Corinth was a city known for its licentiousness and depravity.
- Paul arrived at this pagan hotspot alone and discouraged.
- Silas and Timothy were supposed to catch up with him in Athens but he left before they arrived.
- Exhausted and financially depleted, he engages in two necessary and mundane activities.
- He has to find a place to live and he has to find work.
- Now, don't miss God's hand of providence in providing for Paul's needs.
- Paul meets a remarkable couple named Aquila and Priscilla.
- Luke tells us a few things about them.
- Aquila is a Jew, a native of Pontus.
- They were living in Italy and had recently come to Corinth. after being ejected from Rome by edict of Claudius.
- They also shared the same occupation as Paul—they were tentmakers by trade; workers of leather.
- Paul needed a place to live and a job to survive. He walks into a tent-maker's shop, and who does he find? Two displaced, persecuted believers from Rome!
- They shared a craft, they shared a home, and they shared the Gospel.
- It wasn't coincidence; it was divine orchestration.
- God took what seemed like a crippling crisis for this faithful couple and used it as a strategic appointment and partnership for Paul.
- God uses all of these circumstances providentially orchestrated by him to meet Paul's needs and forge a beautiful gospel partnership that would bless churches across the empire.
- Your work, the neighborhood you live in, and the people you meet are not accidental or coincidental; they are part of the Sovereign Architect's design.
- He uses simple, ordinary means to connect us to others.
- Your tent-making, whatever it is, is not just a paycheck; it's a platform for providence.
- Just like your home, your work is also a place for mission.
- Paul thought highly of Aquila and Priscilla as co-laborers in the gospel.
- Romans 16:3-4 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.
- In his first letter to the church at Corinth, he sends greetings from them and the church that meets in their house to the believers at Corinth. (1 Cor 16:19)
- They didn't just give Paul a job, they gave him a home and community.
- At his lowest point, God used their living room as a sanctuary.
- Is your home, are your resources used to refresh weary servants and to build up fellow believers?
- The simplest act of hospitality can be a strategic appointment by God.

III. GOD'S POWER IN OUR PROCLAMATION

- Another major shot in the arm for this weary apostle was the arrival of Silas and Timothy.
 - Their arrival with financial support from the Macedonian church enabled Paul to devote himself fully to the ministry of preaching the Word.
 - “Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.”
 - The Word is powerful, life-giving, soul-saving and it must be the center of our lives and ministry.
 - We need to be occupied with the Word.
 - And here again, Paul is opposed by the Jews.
 - But he stands firm in the Lord and His Word.
 - He pronounces an OT judgment on them. He shakes out his garments, a prophetic symbol of fulfilling his duties as a watchman, which is a reference from Ezekiel 33.
 - We also like watchmen, have a responsibility to herald the good news, and warn people of coming judgment.
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- Paul shifts his preaching one door over from the synagogue to the house of Titius Justus, who was most likely converted during Paul’s synagogue ministry.
 - He is determined not to give up any ground in godless Corinth.
 - And there’s gospel fruit.
 - Many of the Corinthians also believed and were baptized.
 - We have another example of household salvation, this one is also significant in that Crispus, who is the ruler of the synagogue, is the convert.
 - But persecution is coming.
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- But here’s where we’re reminded that Paul is just a man like us.
 - Paul has faced intense opposition and his human resolve is failing.
 - He’s probably ready to quit Corinth.
 - But then Jesus appears!
 - Paul’s weakness and fear are not met with a rebuke from the Lord but with powerful words.
 - Vv9-10 “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”
 - The Lord brings a powerful and timely word of encouragement.
 - The Lord gives him a command, “*Do not be afraid...*”
 - Why do you think he said that to Paul?
 - Because he was. He was afraid.
 - Paul would later write to the church at Corinth that he came to them “*in weakness and in fear and much trembling*” (1 Cor. 2:3).
 - The Lord gives him a glorious promise, “*For I am with you...*”
 - What couldn’t we do for the Lord if we truly believed this?
 - Jesus promises his presence.
 - That’s what he promised his disciples in the Great Commission, “...I am with you always to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).
 - And Jesus promises protection—“*no one will attack you to harm you.*”
 - The Lord gives him the purpose for the promise, “...for I have many in this city who are my people.”
 - Paul must press on and Jesus promises his presence and protection as he continues proclaiming the good news because of God’s saving purpose.
 - There are many in this city who will repent and come to faith in Christ.
 - The success of the gospel in wicked Corinth is not left to chance; It rests on God’s election and effectual call upon His people as the gospel

goes forth.

- This is the confidence we have in our evangelistic effort.
- It's no different today. Our call is not to be successful but to be faithful.
- The success of our ministry rests on God's sovereign election, not on our skills or resolve.
- And he has promised to be with us.
- God's people must not fear! Don't let your spiritual or emotional state dictate your obedience.
- When you feel weak or discouraged or too fearful to speak the gospel word, remember the command, "Go on speaking!"
- The power is in the Word and the presence of Christ, not your current feeling.

IV. GOD'S PROTECTION IN OUR PERSECUTION

- V11 We see the results of Christ's encouragement.
- Paul remained a year and a half teaching the word of God freely and without hindrance in the city of Corinth.
- But here's what we can count on, spiritual advancement will always be met with satanic opposition.
- The Jews who had resisted and rejected Paul will now retaliate by leveraging the Roman legal system against Paul.
- V12 says the Jews made a "united attack on Paul..."
- They are united around their central hatred for Paul, and ultimately their rejection of Christ.
- They bring him before the proconsul Gallio.
- Paul is brought before the court and charged with teaching others to worship a god not allowed under Roman law.
- But the unseen hand of providence is working in the background.
- God uses the indifference of a Roman politician to protect Paul and keep him from further persecution in Corinth.
- Gallio speaks up and dismisses the charge. He doesn't see it as a violation of Roman law but a petty Jewish squabble.
- Gallio's apathy and cynical neutrality in dismissing the case set a powerful legal precedent that favored Christianity.
- Paul is declared innocent in the eyes of Roman officials.
- Gallio's determination that this was an internal matter to the Jews shows that Christianity was viewed as a sect of Judaism, not a new religion.
- As a result of Gallio's indifference, Christianity, for a season, was legally protected and the gospel was given a time to flourish peacefully.
- This is a powerful reminder to us that we don't have to worry or fear about the political climate or the direction of the culture.
- Gallio's indifference was a divinely-ordained umbrella of protection.
- The advance of the gospel does not rely on a friendly government, but an Almighty God.
- God can use the apathy, negligence, or even hostility of human powers to shield His church and advance His purpose.
- Our security is not in the ballot box, but in the Christ who stood in Paul's vision.

V. GOD'S PRESERVATION THROUGH OUR PERSEVERANCE

After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. 19 And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. 21 But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus.

22 When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. 23 After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

- Paul stayed in Corinth a while longer, strengthening the local church that was established in Corinth.
- After that lengthy season of ministry, Paul was determined to head back to his home church in Antioch.
- We have come to the end of Paul's second missionary journey and the start of the third all in this section.
- There is a mention of a vow that Paul undertakes, demonstrating that he is still a pious Jew, he still observes the law but with the freedom he now has in Christ.
- Luke is using this narrative to emphasize that Paul is the founder of the Ephesian church.
- They come to Ephesus and he reasons in the synagogue.
- He is well received there and they wanted him to stay longer, but he is determined to get home.
- He declines and tells them, "If it's God's will I will return to you."
- This is God's mission, not Paul's.
- He leaves Aquila and Priscilla at Ephesus.
- In Jerusalem he greets the brothers at the church and then heads to Antioch, where he stays for a considerable amount of time.
- He touches base with both the Jewish mother church and the Gentile sending church, displaying the unity of the movement.
- After a time, Paul leaves again and goes to strengthen the churches from his first mission in Galatia and Phrygia.
- Paul's work was characterized by perseverance.
- He was committed not just to making converts, but making disciples and strengthening those disciples and the churches that he had started.
- And the local church's mission is to grow and strengthen God's people through the faithful teaching of the word.
- That's how we are strengthened. And we must all diligently persevere in that work and that is how God preserves us in the midst of the opposition that we face.
- Don't measure your faithfulness by your initial excitement, but by your endurance in the difficult places and seasons of life.
- Paul stayed because he believed Christ's promise that there were people to be saved.
- The call to the Christian life is not a sprint, but to faithfully stay the course, knowing God preserves the church one day at a time.

CONCLUSION

- Our passage today reminds us that our weakness is not the end of the story, it's the stage on which God's faithfulness is displayed and shines the brightest.
- In Corinth, Paul learned what every weary saint must remember:

- When you feel spent, remember God's providence, he provides partners to encourage you.
- When you are opposed, remember his power, the Word of God cannot be silenced.
- When you're afraid, remember his protection, no one can harm you apart from his will.
- And when you're weary, remember his promise, "I am with you."
- Press on in faith.
- Speak without fear.
- Serve with all joy.
- The same Christ who stood with Paul in Corinth stands with you today, and he will never leave you or forsake you.

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?