

World Wide Witness: Persevering In Mission

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[0 : 00] So it's Acts chapter 18, 1-22, and it's page 1114 in the Red Bible. After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker, as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade the Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

But when the Jews opposed Paul, he became abusive. He shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, Your blood be on your own heads. I am clear of my responsibility. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles.

Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titus Justus, a worshipper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord, and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

[1 : 16] One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.

So Paul stayed for a year and a half, a year and a half, and teaching them the word of God. While Galileo was pontifical of the Acacia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court.

This man, they charged, is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law. Just as Paul was just about to speak, Galileo said to the Jews, If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you.

But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law, settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things. So he had them ejected from the court.

Then they all turned on Sosin, the synagogue ruler, and beat them in front of the court. But Galileo showed no concern whatsoever.

[2 : 34] Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. He then left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Sancria because of a vow he had taken.

They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. And he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined.

But as he left, he promised, I will come back if it is God's will. Then he set sail for Ephesus. When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then he went down to Antioch.

Thanks, Louise.

There's some notes going around, if you'd like them, and a pen, if you want to take some notes. Just a reminder that we do follow up each of the Sunday morning Bible studies on our Wednesday evening home groups in our gospel communities.

[4 : 02] We look through it a bit more in depth and look through at some of the applications for our lives and for us as a church. So I encourage you to get involved in that.

So we're in Acts 18. And, well, we're really going to focus on the first 17 verses. God Thank you.

Okay, well let's pray. Father, you know how we find the Christian life hard.

Lord, you know how we find being a witness for you hard. And therefore we pray that what we look at together from your word would encourage us, give us strength, give us confidence.

And it would help us to rest in you and in the work that you are doing. So we pray that you would help us all.

[6 : 09] Pour out your spirit on us. Help me to be faithful, to speak clearly. And we pray that we would all be people who are changed and built up as a result of what we hear and look at together.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Men wanted for hazardous journey.

Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Constant danger. Safe return doubtful.

Honor and recognition in case of success. You might have heard those words before. It was an advert placed in a London newspaper by the great explorer Ernest Shackleton as he looked for his team to travel to the Antarctic.

Hazardous journey. Small wages. Bitter cold. Well, gospel work is really no different for Paul. Because for him it meant hazardous journeys, constant danger and safe return doubtful.

[7 : 29] He's coming to the end of his second church planting expedition. If you look there on the screen you'll see the map. He's been sent out from his home church in Antioch. And at the end of this section we saw in verse 22 he returns to his home church in Antioch.

But he's been directed by God through Turkey. That's where it says Phrygia and Galatia. Modern day Turkey where he's been planting churches. But he's gone from there now into Europe, into Greece.

It's a two and a half year trip that would take him through five influential cities. Each bringing its own challenge. In Philippi he faced beatings and imprisonment.

In Thessalonica he had to hide from a rioting mob. In fact we read in chapter 17 that the whole city ended in a riot.

And we're out to get him. In Berea he had to run for his life as opposition increased and closed in. In Athens what we looked at last week he faces loneliness as he ventures into this godless society without his team and he's ridiculed as a babbler.

[8 : 47] And now in chapter 18 we read that after all of this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. It's no wonder then that when Paul would later write to these Christians, to this new church in Corinth, he would say this.

In fact aware of Paul's fear, look at verse 9.

Verse 9. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision. Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking.

Do not be silent. For I am with you. Now I know that many people became Christians in these cities. There were lots of churches planted.

But sometimes I think we forget the fact that Paul was an ordinary human just like us. He wasn't Superman. His name wasn't Peter Parker.

[9 : 59] His name was Paul. He was tired. He was lonely. He was afraid. He felt inadequate. He felt he wanted to get away.

You see, being part of God's mission is like joining Ernest Shackleton on one of his expeditions. Gospel work is always going to be hard work.

So how do we keep going in our Christian lives? And how do we keep going in our gospel work in whatever context that may be? Well, as we follow Paul on this final leg of his journey before he reaches his home family church, we see how God sustains us and he will sustain his mission.

God sustains us and he sustains his mission. First, there are the provision of God's people. Look at verse 1 again. And after this, Paul left Athens and he went to Corinth.

There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all of the Jews to leave Rome.

[11 : 17] Now, it was well known that the Jews often went rioting in Rome. It was kind of a kick against the authorities. I don't think Priscilla and Aquila were involved in that, but just the Jews in general didn't like Roman rule.

In fact, they'd become such a headache to Claudius that he's kicked them all out of the city. It was a form of ethnic cleansing. So, politically speaking, we could say Priscilla and Aquila have become refugees.

They've got no home and they've got no work. However, missionally speaking, from God's perspective, they were God's provision to partner Paul in his gospel work.

So, verse 3, Paul went to see them, and because he was a tent maker, that was his livelihood as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

It's literally he became partners with them. Every Sabbath, he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade the Jews and the Greeks.

[12 : 24] So, Paul, having arrived on his own after this, all these trials of going through all these cities and arriving in this city on his own, he's got partners with him now who've joined with him in the gospel.

In fact, when Paul would write to the Christians in Rome, he would refer to Priscilla and Aquila as, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their lives for me and for the churches.

Now, I think we understand what it is to be lonely and to be struggling. And to find things hard. We can find being a Christian in college or in our school really lonely.

Maybe we're the only Christian in our year. We feel inadequate in our witness at work. We maybe feel alone in that.

We maybe feel too weak to fight the daily battle of living a gospel life in a godless world. And whatever context we find ourselves in, being a witness, gospel work is always hard work.

[13 : 48] And what we need is somebody like an Aquila or a Priscilla, somebody who's going to get alongside us. Well, God in his goodness has provided for us.

And the way he provides for us in each of our contexts is through the church, through his people. So the people that we are here with this morning are God's provision for you and for me.

The people that you are sitting beside right now, the person behind you, are God's given partners to you. They are God's gift to you.

They are your fellow workers, people who are going to stick by you, people who are going to walk with you and enable you to keep going as a Christian and people who are going to help you in the Christian ministry.

Now you may be here for all kinds of reasons. You might have been raised and bought up here in Carragoline. You might have moved here because of work.

[14 : 53] You may be here because, well, you got married to somebody who actually lives here. You may simply have decided, I just want a change in location. But for whatever reason you have for being here, please don't lose sight of the great big fact that you are also here as part of God's provision to support and encourage fellow believers in their day-to-day gospel work.

You are not here by chance. You are here as part of God's good design. We are not just weekly attenders turning up to a meeting on a Sunday morning.

We are partners in the gospel. That's why we take time, whether it's tea and coffee, whether it's afterwards, whether it's during the week, to get alongside people.

Nick very helpfully said, not prompted by me, the reason why he looks for a church family, I don't do things well on my own. Well, you know what? None of us do things well on our own.

We've got partners to encourage us and to support us. So we are able to keep going in God's mission because God in his goodness has provided one another to keep on in the mission he has called us to.

[16 : 17] So first, he provides us with people. Second, there is the power of God's Spirit. Verse 5. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, so here now the team is getting bigger, another sign of God's provision, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, to testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

So part of the partnership was that these others would do all the work. They would provide for Paul financially so he could get on with his job. But what kind of response was there for Paul in his preaching?

Well, look at verse 6. But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, your blood be on your own heads.

I am clear of my responsibility. From now on, I'm going to the Gentiles. It was simply a closed door. People didn't want to know.

They refused to accept that Jesus Christ was God's saving King. And so at this point in the account, we're left wondering, is there anybody in this city who could possibly become a Christian?

[17 : 38] They're opposing him. They're against him. And maybe you ask the same question. What is it going to take for, and you fill in the blank there with the person that you know, what will it take for to become a Christian?

Whether it's somebody in your family or somebody in your work or one of your friends. They just seem opposed. They just don't seem interested.

Well, pause in this situation. Well, go back, please, to 1 Corinthians, or go forwards, rather, to 1 Corinthians. Keep your finger in Acts 18.

and jump ahead, Acts Romans, 1 Corinthians. This is chapter 2 and verse 1.

This is Paul's letter that he wrote to these believers. So I've already given the plot away. People do become Christians and he does write a letter to them. But this is what he writes to them.

[18 : 50] And he remembers what it was like when he first arrived there. Chapter 2, verse 1. When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom but on God's power.

You see, it's not about being a great speaker. It's not about us having the right answers. It's not about being clever in our arguments, as helpful and as good as all those things are.

It was simply for Paul about proclaiming Christ and depending on the power of God's Holy Spirit. because this is how God does his work in people who are not yet believers.

[20 : 14] If we take the Spirit of God and here's a little helpful phrase it's on the screen there, the Spirit of God takes the Gospel of God and he works that into people's lives helping them to see, helping them who Christ is.

The Spirit of God takes the Gospel of God and does the work of God in people's lives. You and I can't make anybody become a Christian.

Paul couldn't make anybody become a Christian. Our responsibility is to simply be faithful and to share Christ with others as God provides those opportunities.

That's why Paul would say, go back to chapter 18 and verse 6, he says, your blood be on your own heads. I'm clear of my responsibility. I've presented Christ to you and you don't want to know.

We cannot be responsible for people's response or their reaction. We simply bring Christ living a Christ-like life, offering salvation, warning of judgment and prayerfully resting in the Spirit to take our lives, to take our message and to do the work in people's lives.

[21 : 46] It's not our job to make people believers. So what happened as Paul rested in the power of God's Spirit? Well, look at verse 7 of chapter 18.

He had faced the opposition. They didn't want to know, so Paul left the synagogue and he went next door to a house of Titius Justice, a worshipper of God.

Here was somebody who was interested and look what happens amazingly. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, here was the guy who had been opposed to Paul and had kind of been the leader in it.

Well, he and his entire family believed in the Lord and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

Paul's message hadn't changed. It just simply shows us that salvation is God's work. Sometimes it's opening up one door for somebody, somebody is closing a door on another.

[22 : 47] together. But it's the Spirit of God taking the Gospel of God and doing the work of God in people's lives. It's God's work.

So the reason Paul could keep going, the reason we can keep going when we face the opposition is because it's not dependent on us, it's not about our power, but it's about the power of God's Spirit opening up people's eyes to hear the truth of who Christ is.

The third thing that we look at, we see in verses 9 to 10, is that we can keep going because of God's promise. Despite people coming to faith, Paul was still very afraid about speaking to people.

I take comfort from that. I'm glad Paul was afraid because I'm pretty scared too. Gospel work is always hard work. But look what the Lord has to say.

Verse 9, one night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, do not be afraid, keep on speaking, do not be silent, for I am with you, no one is going to attack you and harm you because I have many people in the city, meaning there's lots of people here who are going to become believers in this city.

- [24 : 29] Now while this is a promise, and it is a promise, we have to be very careful that we don't claim too much from this promise. So for example, in verse 10 it says, God says to Paul, no one is going to attack you and harm you.

But have a look at chapter 20 verse 22. A little while after this, chapter 20 verse 22, Paul says, and now compelled by the Spirit I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.

So what happened the promise about protection? Well obviously this promise of protection was quite specific to the city of Corinth for this time that he was going to be there.

And the promise that he received through the vision was nonetheless very encouraging for Paul. It renewed his confidence. So verse 11, Paul stayed for a year and a half teaching them the word of God.

Now we've got to try and figure out how much is this a promise for you and I today. We can't just lift promises and things out of context and say oh this is for me as it was then.

- [25 : 57] Well first and foremost this is a promise for Paul. But I think through this promise God is revealing universal truth to his people for each and every generation.

It's a promise for Paul but in this promise there is truth for us. Let's read verse 10 again. He says for I am with you no one is going to attack and harm you because I have many people in this city.

Now the principle behind the promise is this. God has people whom he will save through you and he will keep you until they are saved.

Did you get that? God has people who he is going to save through you and he will keep you until they are saved.

Do you believe that? I find that a huge encouragement. That means that the people we are with, people who we work with, people who we hang out with, the people that we live with are not coincidences.

- [27 : 18] The relationships that we are in, the people that God has given to you in those circumstances are those who God knows about who already in God's plan has them belonging to God but through you they are going to believe in God.

So verse 9, do not be afraid, keep on speaking, do not be silent for I am with you.

Now that doesn't mean the next time we meet a friend or a buddy we say to them excuse me are you elect? Are you predestined? Are you chosen?

Because if you are I have something to tell you. Well the fact is they don't know and they'll look at you fairly oddly and the reality is we don't know.

God does and I'm glad he does. It's his business. God is the one who knows and he is the one who will ultimately save and that gives us huge encouragement because it's not about us.

- [28 : 32] God has those who he will save through people like you and me and he is going to keep us until they are saved.

That is ultimately the purpose of why we are here. God is going to keep your life. He's going to preserve your life. You will not live a day longer or a day less until God has brought to salvation all those that he wants to save through you.

That's how he works. We can't plan this out. We can't even fathom it. But it gives us great confidence that God will work through people like us as he pleases.

So we can keep on going because of the promise of God's word. And then the fourth one is we can keep going because of God's providence over all things.

Gospel work is hard work and even with all the promises opposition continues. verse 12. While Galio was proconsul of Achaia the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court.

[29 : 59] Now this puts Paul into a serious situation. He knows what Roman rulers are capable of doing. His own friends Priscilla and Aquila had been kicked out of Rome.

He knows fine well what had happened to Jesus when he had faced a Roman court. There is no guarantee that Paul is going to get justice.

In fact look at the end of this account. Look at what this judge is like. Verse 17. At the end of this situation we're told that they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and they beat him up.

They gave him a good kicking in front of the court. Galio the judge, well he showed no concern whatsoever. He just let them get on with it. It seems that he's not bothered what happens to people so long as people are happy and he kind of keeps some kind of order and the majority of the people are happy, it's all okay.

He's not the kind of judge you would want at this time. So it's really not looking good for Paul. But then verse 14, just as Paul was about to speak, maybe he had some kind of defence lined up as something he could say.

[31 : 17] Well, Galio interrupted and he said to the Jews, if you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanour or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you.

Well, it's such a contradiction to his character, especially when he let Sosthenes get beaten up a little while later. Verse 15, but since it involves questions about words and names of your law, well settle the matters yourselves.

I'm not going to judge on these things. That's theology, that's not my department, you look after that. Roman rule it may be, but God's providence is overruling all of this.

God has his hand on Paul's life, and God has his hand over the rulers of the day. And in our life and over God's mission, he will work all things for good to what he wants to do.

And that's what we can take from this as we venture out into a new week, as we keep going as a church family to be his witness, to be involved in his mission.

[32 : 31] We have a God who is over every single ruler, over every single event and circumstance. We don't always understand what's going on or what's happening, but we trust that he is in control and he will work all things for his good.

Gospel work is hard work. We will always face obstacles. We will face opposition.

And as you go into this week, whether you're going into school, whether to college, whether you're looking after your children, whether to work, wherever you find yourself, you will feel weak.

You may be afraid. You may be feel lonely. But God will sustain us. He saw Paul through Corinth and he will sustain us in our mission as we live for him.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we confess that we are very often afraid, we're very often feeling lonely, and we're very often feeling weak.

[34 : 09] weak. But we thank you that you have provided for us one another, so we are not alone.

Thank you that you have given to us the power of your Holy Spirit, because we are weak, but it's his power at work through us.

We thank you that you have given us the promises of your word, so although we feel afraid going into new situations, you have your hand over us, and you will keep us to do your work that you have called us to.

And we thank you for your rule over all of our lives, over our work, over our family, over our college, and over our friends.

we trust you with it all, and we praise you that you are a good and a great God. In Jesus' name we pray.

[35 : 21] Amen. Amen. Well, our vision going forward has to be here for to be a hat.

Amen.