

God Loves to Encourage His People

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[0:00] If you take your Bibles and go to the book of Acts, chapter 18, book of Acts, chapter 18, if you're visiting with us, if you pull out that black Bible in a chair in front of you, and go towards the back and find page 108, 108, you'll find Acts, chapter 18.

We're back in the book of Acts. We've been going through the book of Acts. We took a little break from our study, and now we're back in Acts. Acts, chapter 18, we're going to read and study this morning, the first 22 verses.

Acts, chapter 18, starting in verse 1, I'll read the first 22 verses, then we'll start our study.

After these things, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, and he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.

He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they were working, for by trade they were tent makers. And he was reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath in trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

[1:34] But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, and when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, your blood be upon your own heads, I am clean.

From now on I shall go to the Gentiles. And he departed from there, and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justice, a worshiper of God whose house was next to the synagogue. And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians, when they heard, were believing and being baptized. And the Lord said to Paul in the night by vision, do not be afraid, but go on speaking, and do not be silent.

For I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in the city. And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. But while Galileo was pro-council of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul, and brought him before the judgment seat, saying, this man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law. When Paul was about to open his mouth, Galileo said to the Jews, if it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime of Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you. If there are questions about words, names, and your own law, look after it yourselves.

[2:56] I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters. He drove them away from the judgment seat. And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the judgment seat.

And Galileo was not concerned about any of these things. Verse 18, And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria.

And with him were Priscilla and Aquila. And Sancrea, he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. And he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent. But taking leave of them, he said, I will return to you again, if God wills. He set sail for Ephesus, from Ephesus.

And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and went down to Antioch. Mark Stoops, head football coach of University of Kentucky.

[4:00] The title of the article says, Mark Stoops sends letter of encouragement to season ticket holders in Christmas card. Kentucky head football coach Mark Stoops sends season ticket holders a Christmas card every year.

This year, he added a letter encouraging the fans to stay by this team. This is what the letter said. Season ticket holders, thank you for your continued support of this program and our players. We're working very hard to build a football program that will make you proud. I'm encouraged by the hard work we're seeing from our team as they work to give you the product you deserve. They are motivated, I am motivated, and we know the BBN is hungry. Your passion is felt by each and every one of us. You are the backbone and foundation of everything we do, and we can't thank you enough for your support.

We need you all in Commonwealth Stadium next year. See you there for the spring game on April 16. Together we will get this done. Go Big Blue, Mark Stoops. Well, that's kind of cool to send it.

[5:05] If you're a season ticket holder for University of Kentucky fans, then you would get this letter from Mark Stoops. Has anyone ever sent you just a letter of encouragement?

Ever got something in the mail? Hell yeah, thanks, Joey. Anybody got something in the mail that somebody sends you a little note or a card or an email? Or sends you a text message? Says, hey, I want you to know I'm praying for you.

Send you something in the mail. Hey, I want you to know it's just great. Thank you for this or that, whatever. When I was 19, 18, 19 years old, Greg Bernheisel would send me little notes.

Here and there. Thanks, Jim, for ministering. Thanks for being faithful. Kind of lifts your spirits, huh? It encourages you. Like, wow, thanks.

It elevates you. It boosts you up. So you can keep going. Do you know God does this too?

[6:06] God does this too. God encourages us. With His promises. As we come here in the book of Acts, just do it. Be who you are. Let God use you to fulfill His mission.

And we come to this part in the book of Acts. God loves to encourage His people. God loves to encourage His people. God loves to encourage His people.

He loves to encourage His church. He loves to encourage His followers. The followers of Jesus. I'll put in a statement for you.

God loves to encourage His people. A long statement. As God is using us to fulfill His mission, He loves to give us ample amounts of His encouraging promises in the midst of life's ups and downs. We see in this passage, how Paul goes to Corinth. He meets Priscilla and Aquila. All these things are happening. Going to the synagogue. Meeting hostility.

[7:13] Turns his attention to the Gentiles. There's great results. People coming to Christ. A dispute rises up. Possibly going to get kicked out of the city. The Romans just kind of pushes that aside.

So then he leaves Corinth. He goes to Ephesus. And he leaves Ephesus and ends up in Antioch. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And yet what we see here, right in the middle of it, so God encouraged Paul to continue proclaiming the gospel.

In the midst of discouragement, opposition, tough times, suffering, the ups of life, and the downs of life.

God promises his people. Why didn't I put that up there? God promises his people to help them to remain steadfast. And we first come to the, in the midst of life's ups and downs.

And first we see in verse 1 through 4, in arduous times, or in hard working times. This is life's ups and downs. The tough or hard working, laborious times of life.

[8:31] Look at verse 1. Paul left Corinth, excuse me, left Athens and went to Corinth. Now we have to understand something about Corinth. First of all, it was a cosmopolitan city.

40 miles from Athens. A mixture of people, groups, and religions. The population, and for us, I mean, we don't think it's a big deal, but for that time it was, about 200,000 people.

It was a lot like our cities of today. And it was a commercial city. It was a popular key city. It was a major port. The Isthmian games were held, once every two years.

And it was just booming with money, and prosperity. So it was a cosmopolitan city. It was a commercial area. And it was corrupt.

It was a very corrupt city. It had a reputation for its decadence. Kind of like the Las Vegas, right? Of our era. It was infamous, even in the Greco-Roman world.

[9:41] I mean, if someone called you, oh, you're such a Corinthian. It was like, calling someone, you're such a pervert. Perverted behavior. She never wanted to be called a Corinthian.

The goddess of love. Aphrodite. That was the central aspect of Corinth. There was temple prostitutes everywhere. So this is where Paul comes.

And notice he meets, in verse 2, found a certain Jew, meets Aquila. And then his wife Priscilla. They had just come from Italy. There was an edict of Claudius. Claudius kicked out the Jews due to a civil disturbance at the instigation of Crestus. We don't know what this means. Possibly it's a reference to Christians. Jesus being the Christ. Maybe it was a Jewish activist. Whatever was going on, it was causing riots. And Claudius, as the emperor, just kicked them all out. So they left. And they came to Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla. [10:44] And they're of the same trade. Notice, verse 3, he came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them. And they were working. By trade, there were tent makers, and he was raising in the synagogue.

Verse 4, every Sabbath, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. They were leather workers. That's what the word means. So he worked during the week, and would preach on the weekend. They connected together because they were Jews, they had the same trade, they were believers. He found out they were Christians. They proved, they proved to be great friends to them. They would be so significant to the work of the gospel.

You actually see them later on in the letters from Paul, Aquila and Priscilla. Actually, Priscilla and Aquila would be first. So he worked during the day. He was a gospel proclaimer on the weekends. As was his custom, he would go into the synagogue on the Sabbath, trying to persuade the Jews and the Greeks that Jesus was truly the Christ. This would be a challenging place, a challenging time for Paul in the city of Corinth.

[11:52] It's hard work to do ministry and work a full-time or part-time job. That's hard to do. I've done it. It's not easy.

But it's when times are difficult and grueling that we need God to encourage us with his promises. Are you feeling like that today?

Are you facing difficulty? Hard work? Tough times? Hard working times? You're working yourself basically to the bone.

God encourages us in those times. In the arduous times. Number two, also, oh, I didn't put that up there. I'm not on my game here.

Are you feeling like that today? Are you facing difficulty, hard working, tough times? Let God's promises encourage you today. In arduous times and in hostile times as well. In verse 5 and 6, when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself completely to the Word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

[13:08] Silas and Timothy came, possibly they had funds to help out Paul, so he took those funds, he was able to devote himself fully to gospel preaching, gospel proclaiming.

Testifying that Jesus was truly the Christ. Jesus is the chosen one. By Jesus, he is the only one that can save you. That's what we believe here.

Jesus Christ is the only one who can save you. If you're here today, you're not a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, you don't believe in him to be the Christ, you must understand that God in his judgment must condemn you.

And yet God is gracious and compassionate and he welcomes you with open arms to anyone who repents, turns from their sin and puts their trust in Jesus Christ alone.

That's the gospel. So Paul is proclaiming the gospel, repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Notice what happens, verse 6. And when they resisted, there's hostility and they blasphemed.

[14:15] He shook out his garments and said to them, your blood be upon your own heads, I'm clean. I'm going to the Gentiles now. The Jews rejected the gospel message.

Paul had enough of it. I'm done. He shook the dust off his garment. Blood be upon your own heads. I'm going to the Gentiles. Not completely.

I mean, he would first go to the Jews and the Gentiles. He's talking about there in Corinth. But they were culpable for rejecting the truth which he had given to them. So he broke off relations going to the synagogue.

I'm done. I'm not going to be responsible for you guys rejecting the gospel. For you guys rejecting the truth. He faced hostile times.

He faced, really tough, fighting type times. At some point, once the gospel is given, it's on the hearer's head.

[15:16] Brethren, you can only do what you can do. You can only do so much. You give the truth and you let God work. This could be so discouraging.

It could be disappointing. You have a tension in a relationship when you're giving someone the gospel. Have you given someone the gospel in your family and it turned sour? That's when you need the encouragement of God's promises.

We need the encouragement of God's promises in arduous times. We need the encouragement of God's promises in hostile times. But we also need it, number three, I keep doing this.

It's my problem. It's the third time. I'm not on my game here. I'm not on my game. I don't know.

You're not. Praise God. That's when we need God's encouraging promises. Was that out loud? I'm sorry. Number three, now in number three, in happy times. In arduous times, hardworking times, in hostile times, but also in happy times.

[16:24] Seven and eight, notice what happens. He left the synagogue, went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justice, a worshiper of God.

His house is next to the synagogue. And then Crispus, here's two converts that are noted. First, one was a God-fearer who became a Christian.

Then Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, he converted. Even though there was opposition, people come to Christ. And not only that, but notice, Crispus and his whole household, and then many of the Corinthians, when they heard, they were believing and being baptized.

God-fearers, and many pagans in Corinth, became followers of the Lord Jesus. Happy times too. Even in good times, we need to remember God's promises to us.

Tough, hostile, happy times. What about stressful times? Yes, in stressful times, we need God's encouraging promises.

[17:38] When we get anxious, or stressed out about life, like, what will happen next? The Lord encourages us with His promises. This is what happens in verse 12 through 17.

I've got it up there, right? Yeah. Galio was pro-council. The Jews had just about had it with Paul. With one accord that rose up against him, brought him before the judgment seat.

This man persuades men to worship God, country to the law. They accused him. He was calling people to worship God, a country to some law. What law are they talking about?

Was it the Jewish law? Not really sure. Not really told. Maybe it was, they were complaining that this new faith was not a legit, recognized religion of Rome.

Whatever law he was breaking, they wanted Galio to make Paul leave them alone and shut his trap. Now, Galio, he was a popular, wise ruler.

[18:41] He was an anti-Semite. Mind you. He was a meticulous lawyer which would be to Paul's advantage. Well, really, they wanted protection for their own religious beliefs, but they wanted the Roman government to clamp down on Paul and what he's proclaiming.

Well, nothing's really changed, has it? people are very willing to let their own beliefs be spoken, but not so with biblical Christianity. That's when intolerance comes in, doesn't it?

You've probably faced that yourself. Notice, verse 14, Paul was about to open his mouth, and Galio said, Jews, if it's a matter of wrong, a vicious crime, then let's talk.

If there are questions, verse 15, about words, names, your own law, look after it yourselves. That's why I think maybe it's the Jewish law that's what he's talking, that's what he's thinking they were talking about. Look after yourselves.

I'm not going to listen to you. It doesn't concern me. It's an inquiry outside the order because no true crime was committed by Paul.

[19:57] In other words, Luke is showing us that Christianity was no legal threat to Rome and really is not a legal threat to any government in the world.

Jesus' disciples truly are peaceful. What was it said? Islam is a peaceful religion. Whether you agree with that statement, Christianity, it truly is the peaceful religion.

That's really what it is. Biblical Christianity. But it's a major stress in your life when the government attacks you, isn't it? But Christianity is and always has been a belief system of peace, grace, and submission to governments.

It has, in its very fabric, endorsed liberty of conscience or religious liberty. We could even state a case, by the way, it's the Baptists who inherently have believed in liberty of conscience.

and religious liberty. It's inherited within Baptist belief. So Christianity, biblical Christianity is the only belief system that proclaims and displays true grace and peace.

[21:23] It's the only one. It's the only belief system that allows people to make their own individual conscious choice. The only belief system that allows people to believe what they so desire and then

you try to persuade them otherwise.

It's the only one. If you take the acrostic Baptist and the I of Baptist, it means individual soul liberty. We believe an individual must believe of their own accord and you can persuade them but you don't force them to do anything.

Well, notice Galileo just kind of shooed them away. Rome will change its view though on Christianity later on in the first century and in the centuries to follow because allegiance to God was seen as a competition to Caesar and the state.

So what's the point from this section that we're going to see when life brings stress, anxiety, worry, nervousness, fear, uneasiness, trepidation, that's when God's encouraging promises are needed most.

Come to the Lord. Be encouraged with His promises. I still haven't told you the promises yet, have I? I know. I'm getting there. Take it easy.

[22 : 55] There's a madness to my method. Yeah, I mean, yeah. So He shoo's in the way verse 16, verse 17, they took hold of Sosthenes which quite possibly is the same Sosthenes say that ten times real fast in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 1 He took hold of them the leader of the synagogue and beat him in front of the judgment and Galilee was like whatever.

Go away. He didn't do anything. That tells us a lot about Roman rule. For some reason, Sosthenes, maybe he was a believer or sympathetic to Christians, that's why they took him and beat him publicly.

But Rome was staying out of the dispute. But now there's something here that we must take away that was good for Paul yet it's also scary. This type of prejudice and hostility could soon be directed at Christians.

Which tells us something else. We can't always look to government to give us true, real justice.

They will do whatever they want to do. We cannot put our hope in government.

You cannot put your hope in this thing called the U.S. Constitution. You cannot do that.

Governments will let you down. Arduous times.

[24 : 20] Hostile times. Happy times. Stressful times. One more, number five. Strategic times. Or, just the normal, mundane, everyday things of life.

18 to 22. The pressure is off Paul. He remained a few days longer. Then he took leave of the brethren. Went to Syria. Put out to sea and took Priscilla and Aquila with him.

Notice, in Synchria, he had his hair cut. He was keeping a vow. Which means he preferred to keep Jewish law. But he wasn't under obligation to keep it. Verse 19, he came to Ephesus and then he would go into the synagogue and reason with the Jews.

They asked him to stay but he couldn't. He says, if the Lord wills, I'll stay. So it seems like he wanted to get back to Jerusalem, which we'll talk about in just a moment. So from the text, he went down, set sail from Ephesus.

Notice he leaves Aquila and Priscilla there. Excuse me. Priscilla and Aquila there in Ephesus. Verse 22, he landed at Caesarea. And then it says he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

[25 : 39] Whenever the text says when goes up or someone goes up, it means most likely that they go up to Jerusalem because Jerusalem was on a hill. So it seems like that Paul went up to Jerusalem and said hello to the church there.

He wanted to be there by Passover. So this is like 49, 50, 80. And then he came back down and landed there in Antioch. Another opportunity to encourage the church securing support from the church in Antioch.

They were the ones that sent him out in the first place. And then starting in verse 23, which we'll look at next week, he begins the third and last missionary journey. So what does this tell us?

So God encouraged us with his promises even in the mundane, ordinary planning things of his life. We still need to remember his promises then too. So whether you're talking about times where you're just working to the bone, hostile times, happy times, stressful times, or just strategic, normal, life type times, that's when God encourages us with his promises.

So then the question that you have, what are his promises? There's three, which we get that from verse 9 and 10.

[27 : 03] The only two verses we haven't looked at this time. The Lord said to Paul in the night by vision, do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you.

No man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in the city. We'll look at verse 11 in just a moment. What are his promises? The Lord is with you. The Lord's grace is given to you. The Lord will accomplish his purposes through you. Those are his promises. Probably the most important part in this whole section.

God's promises to Paul in the midst of oppression, opposition, suffering, uncertainty, normal mundane things of life, planning.

This was the confidence that Paul needed to hear from the Lord. Maybe Paul was discouraged. I mean, Paul, maybe he was fearful. I mean, remember when Paul would come into a city, he would preach the gospel, the Jews would run him off, he'd go to the Gentiles, and then something would happen, and then he'd have to run, right?

[28:17] He'd have to escape for his very life. So maybe he was fearful because of that. But this time, the Lord Jesus wanted him to stay put and to teach.

He commanded Paul to stay and continue to teach and proclaim the truth. Why? This is for you, Christian. This is for you, follower of Jesus Christ.

This is for us. The Lord is with you. The Lord's grace is given to you. And the Lord will accomplish his purposes through you. Let me say it in a different way.

The Lord Jesus was with Paul. Number two, no one would harm him. You see that? No one would harm him. But notice, it doesn't say there won't be suffering.

He wouldn't be able to endure. And third, God's elect were present in the city. Because he says, for I have many people in the city. If you are a Christian today, these promises are yours.

[29:27] If you know the Lord Jesus Christ, God is with you. And God's grace will sustain you. He doesn't say you're not going to suffer. He just says you'll be sustained by His grace.

And God's going to use you to accomplish His mission, to accomplish His purposes. He's going to use you to do that. And that's why Paul wasn't supposed to stop doing this or stop doing that, change the methods.

No. The Lord simply told him just keep speaking, keep teaching, and with confidence he says to Paul, I'm with you. Let that be your confidence. This was God's task for Paul.

And God would enable Paul to complete it. This is God's task for you. And God will enable you to complete it. The Lord would intervene so that instead of some fast mission and escape, there would be slow teaching and slow discipling.

Wherever God has you today, He will accomplish His plan through you. Wherever God has you today, He will accomplish His plan for you. And notice, as a result of Paul's proclamation, more people would come to Christ showing themselves to be part of God's elect people.

[30:49] In other words, those appointed for eternal life would believe. Because he says, I have many people in the city. Well, some had responded, but I have many people. There's more to come.

By Paul's faithful proclamation, many more people would come to Christ. God's elect people. Christian, the Lord Jesus is with you.

He gives you grace to endure and it is sufficient. He will accomplish His plan through you. He will. Those are His promises. Are you discouraged?

Are you suffering? Are you in despair? Don't fear. Because God is with you, Christian. He loves you so much in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have His backing.

You have His love. You have His grace. Whether you're talking about hardworking times.

[31:51] Whether you're talking about times of hostility. Work. Neighbors. Friends. Relatives. Just got over the holidays. You know. I love my relatives, but I'm glad they're gone.

You know, type thing. Happy times. Stressful times. Just normal life. Maybe you have this next week off and then things start up January 4th.

Maybe you go back to work tomorrow. And all these times you can be encouraged with God's promises. He's with you. His grace is given to you and He will accomplish His purposes through you.

Verse 11. And He settled there a year and six months teaching the Word of God among them. What's this? Our response.

What should our response be? Trust and obey. Paul trusted the Lord and obeyed. He stayed there a year and a half teaching them the Word of God. All that the Gospel entails.

[32:54] This was different. Normally Paul just go, these skedaddles. No. This time he obeyed the Lord. He trusted God's promises and obeyed.

That's the response from us. Isn't this a great time to end 2015? A great passage to end 2015 and to begin 2016?

Here's God's promises for you, Christian. Ending 2015. Maybe for some of you you're like, oh good. now starting a new year.

What can you start a new year with? Be encouraged. With God's promises. Christian, He loves you. He's with you. His grace will sustain you, Christian.

And the Lord will use you to accomplish His purposes in those hard working times, in those times of hostility, in the happy times, in the stressful times, in just the normal things of life.

[33:56] God's promises are there to encourage you. Can we pray for a moment? God, give us grace to remember Your promises and encourage us as Your people, as followers of Jesus Christ with these promises that You've given to us.

If you would, take a few moments of just pondering what we've seen in God's Word here in Acts chapter 18. Think about it and let it go through your mind.

Consider what we've seen. Remember God's promises to you. Remember how God loves you. The Father loves you in the Lord Jesus Christ sending Him to die for your sin and to change and transform you and His grace is sufficient.

He will use you to accomplish His purposes. Remind yourself of that. And we'll take a few moments of silence so you can think and ponder and then we'll do our time of giving and singing our last two songs in closing prayer.

So take a few moments of silence. deep Ray as follows.

[35:25] He could overcome how flows and great That's how we pay and take and answer and command to the Son who areings with that kind of Sadly, that all can move to the mij with people who are and you havelike environment.

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