

# Acts 18:1-17 "The Gospel in the City"

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 28 January 2024

Preacher: Bishop Dan Gifford

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Well, what a joy it is to be with you. And, you know, even in a theater, it's like a real Anglican church where everybody's sitting at the back, or most people are, and you're scattered through here. But it's just a wonderful thing to be with you at the 8 o'clock service and here at the 10 as well. I have been very aware of this church for many, many years, going back well before Annex was formed, the diocese that I'm the bishop of now. And I've known George for many years in the Essentials Days and so forth. And, you know, the thing that has always struck me is what a blessing it is to have the testimony of your church, the faithfulness to the gospel, your willingness to stand for the gospel in very hard times at times to stand up for the gospel, for the faithfulness of your rector, George, and his preaching, for the way that you have trained many people to lead in God's church as well, is an incredible gift that goes well beyond this church. And I'm just thankful, especially for the fact that you all are people who understand and you are taught that the purpose of life is to actually be people who are sent out by God, sent out by God to help people be followers of the Lord Jesus. That there's a purpose for life that is, encompasses all of your occupations, all of your professions, all of your family life, the things that are important to you, surrounding that and at the center of it all is that Jesus commissions you to follow the Lord Jesus.

And I, and to help others do the same. And so I'm very encouraged by the fact that you are going through the book of Acts. Acts is a very unique book because it is like a history of the church and you preach it differently as you've been hearing because what you're doing is you're seeing in many places what it means to be those who are God's church. What does it look like in real terms to be people who are following Jesus as a body in different places in the world? Paul often talks about the way that he teaches, the way that he forms people is asking people to imitate him.

Imitate me, he will say over and over again. Because what you see in Paul's life is the work of God's grace in it. And you see how he is a missionary into the world, which all of us are called to in unique ways as well. And so what we are seeing in Acts, especially in this part we're in right now, is you are seeing what it looks like to be a missionary in the world by looking at Paul and his life.

[ 4 : 2 3 ] And we have some great lessons to learn. And one of them is that you are finishing the first part of the book of Acts and you're going to come to it sometime before the Lord Jesus comes back again, I know. But what I want to do is kind of jump ahead a little bit. You're at Acts 9 and 10 right now.

I'm going to jump ahead to Acts 18 because at that point of that great book, there is a change that happens where Paul is going to big cities, starting with today in Acts 8. He starts going to some big cities. And there's a reason for that because they become centers for God's word to go out into other churches and for people to be sent out from those places. In the Roman Empire, if you're going to look through Acts 18 after the service in the afternoon, read the whole chapter, you see every big city in the Roman Empire mentioned. Did you know that? It mentions Rome in this

chapter. Rome was a million people at that time. And there isn't going to be a city of a million people again until London in something like the 17th, 18th century. A huge city. And then there is Ephesus coming up after this. That's 250,000 people.

He's going to be going to Jerusalem, which wasn't huge, but it's a major center. And then Antioch had 500,000 people up to. And Alexandria is mentioned that's around. That's almost as big as well as Antioch. So all those big cities are mentioned in this one chapter. And there's a reason for that. It's because the city has a very central place in God's mission. And in fact, in his purposes. The goal of all of humanity is that one day in the new heaven and the new earth, we will be part of the new Jerusalem.

It talks about a city. A city where people interact with one another. They serve one another. They worship the Lord Jesus. They are living this exciting life of living for one another and for God in relationship to one another with God in the very center of that massive community. And that's where we're all heading. And then God blesses the city by bringing the gospel into it to affect the city for the sake of the gospel, to bring people out of darkness into the glorious light of the Lord Jesus. And so Paul is going to be looking at the cities coming up. And I want you to look at Acts 18, 1 through 17. If you have a phone, you can look at that on your phone. And people won't think that you're playing video games or you're texting or you're checking out TikTok. You can look at your Bible right now or use this. And if you use this, I'm discovering some of you may need reading glasses.

[ 7 : 27 ] This is the smallest print I've ever seen. So, but let's look at Acts 18. And as we go there, I just want to say something that Jesus said in his own words. Jesus not only was about his relationship with individuals and blessing those individuals, which of course we see in his ministry, but he ministered to a whole city as well. He prayed for Jerusalem as a city. And he said this, he said, when he draw near and saw the city of Jerusalem, Jesus wept over it, over the whole city. And he said, would that you, even you had known on this day the things that make for peace, the things that make for peace, which is the gospel of Jesus that makes for peace with us and God and with one another as well. Oh, that you, that whole city would know the things that make for peace. So Jesus' mission of salvation is for individuals, but also for whole cities as well. And Corinth was one of those cities. It's a very interesting place. If you know the background of it, it was destroyed 200 years before Paul was there, destroyed by the Romans. And then a hundred years before Paul, it began to be rebuilt. And that city took off. It was in a, it's on a peninsula with two harbors, north and south. One harbor looked towards

Italy and Rome and the other harbor looked over to Asia. So Europe and Asia. And it became incredibly prosperous. It was the commercial center of the Roman empire. It was a place of great influence, very successful people. It was a place where people loved spiritual, spirituality. They used their wealth to build incredible temples to Apollos, to Poseidon, the god of the, of the seafarers and to, um, Aphrodite, to Venus, who was the god of, goddess of love. And so there was a real sense of, uh, uh, of things happening in this city. But the city was also a place of great moral darkness. Uh, there was evil in that city. It was a place where, um, uh, especially it was known for sexual immorality. Even in Rome, which was not the, uh, the saintly, most saintliest of cities. If you were called a, if you were a very corrupt person, if you were sexually immoral, you were called a Corinthianizer. That's the reputation

Corinth had. Um, they, they were all about fulfilling the most, uh, base, uh, sort of corrupt desires that a person would have. In fact, their worship was just made very clear where from the temple of Aphrodite, uh, a thousand, at least a thousand prostitutes would come out every night into the city as well.

So there was this great moral and spiritual darkness in the city. With all of its accomplishments, uh, power, wealth, and creativity, it was a place of pride, a place of arrogance, it was a place of deep selfishness and catering to the most corrupt desires. It was a place that seemed very far from God and resistant to him. But this chapter shows that God is, the gospel of God is meant for the cities, even this kind of city. In fact, I think it's this kind of city where the brightness of the gospel is made most clear to us. Um, and it shows that God is about transforming people, but also whole communities as well. Um, I think that one of the things that we can, you know, we have different images for the church. One image for the church is that it is like a little city. It is a community of people who live together, who connect with one another, and who are, who are actually influencing the larger city around them for the sake of the gospel of Jesus. They are seeking ways as a small

city, a community that's growing together in the Lord Jesus to bless the bigger city that they are a part.

Um, but getting out back to Paul, Paul comes, Paul comes into that city and sees everything I described and it is daunting. It is daunting. There's no church there. There's no little city of Christians there.

[12:18] It is just Paul coming there alone, which is very unusual for him and seeing all of this immensity of religions opposed to God, great wealth, great corruption, and great moral evil. And in that, he felt weak and he felt frightened. We know that because in his letter to the Corinthians, he said, you know, when I first came to you, how did I come? I came with weakness and fear and much trembling.

Not much confidence there, it seems, in him. And I'm actually encouraged by that because I feel that way sometimes in ministry. I see what is going on and thinking, how can anything good happen here? That's probably what Paul was thinking, if he's in that kind of weakness. But in the weakness, we know through the letters to the Corinthians that God's power and his gospel are very, very evident.

They actually shine out in Corinth. And so it's good for us to look at Paul's experience. And there's three things, three aspects I want to touch on about his experience there that helps us when we think of our mission to the city, this city of Ottawa. The first is that there is this warm, is the word I think of, warm interdependence. And it's an interdependence within the church, there's no loners, interdependence with churches outside Corinth, and interdependence that Paul has with people, people who become friends. And secondly, it's another entce, there's no silence. There's going to be, you're going to see a command not to be silent about the good news of Jesus. And then thirdly, there is a strong confidence in Jesus being Lord over that city of Corinth. There's a confidence in Jesus Lordship. And God actually provides all of this. It's not something that Paul manufactures. As I said, in thinking about interdependence, Paul comes alone. He had a terrible time in northern Greece with the three communities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Wonderful churches are planted there by Paul's work and the God work powerfully. But in each of them, Paul leaves communities for fear of his life. And he is beaten in those places. He is jailed. He is experiencing incredible rejection. And in the end, they said, look, you got to go. Even before Silas and Tim, who are going to be working with the church to get them going and get the support for the mission going, he went alone to Athens. And instead of sort of hiding out in Athens and going, checking into a hotel to kind of recuperate, he goes to the marketplace. And he grieves over the city because there's no belief in God. There's no knowledge of the living God. And he interacts with the intellectual leaders of the world there. You know, what a thing to do. So he, and wonderful, we have that wonderful text from Acts 17, speaking about who Jesus is to skeptics.

But he leaves there and he must have been depleted coming in to Corinth. And he has to, and not only that, but he doesn't have much money. So he's got to get a job. And God provides this couple, Aquila and Priscilla, the most attractive people. They were tent makers. They're from Rome. They got kicked out of Rome. You can see at the beginning of our passage here. And they, they are successful business people. We know that because they can travel. Paul seeks them out because he's, he's got skills in this area as well. And, and he meets with them and they become lifelong friends.

[16:26] They became partners in ministry, people who would support him through everything he would go through in the future. And they were incredibly helpful for him networking in the city of, of Corinth, meeting with other people that they knew that they had influenced with, meeting with the business community. They did an incredible amount to make the spread of the gospel possible for Paul and to provide a living for him as well. There's an interdependence that's set up that he is needed with these friends. And then if you look at verse four, another thing happens. Paul is reasoning with the synagogue during that time and not a lot is happening yet. He's not able to devote fully his time.

He's trying to persuade Jews and Greeks that Jesus is the Messiah, uphill struggle. But in the midst of that, that Silas and Timothy finally come to Corinth and they are bringing with them a financial gift from Philippi and the churches up there. And what that means is that Paul can give up his tent making.

And in verse five, if you look there, he said he was occupied. He's got a full-time ministry by the word. A full-time job now. And he's testifying that Jesus is the Christ.

So you see these resources of friendship and of finances freeze Paul up to speak every day in Corinth. And the result is extraordinary. Look at verse six. There is opposition that becomes very intense and so much so that Paul leaves and tells them from now on I'm going to the Gentiles. He starts meeting with them right next door. And amazingly in verse eight, not only are Gentiles being converted, but Crispus, who is the synagogue ruler, believes in Jesus. Not only him, but his whole family. The whole group, the people who are working for him, his children, his wife and relatives all become Christian. And it's an extraordinary thing because you have the whole range. You have people who are pagans living the Corinthian lifestyle. And then you've got somebody like Crispus, who is a devout Jew living a moral life. They're all coming into faith in the Lord Jesus for the first time.

[ 18 : 57 ] And it's a powerful work that's happening. In Colossians, we hear how Paul describes it. I love this. It's the power of the gospel. He says, he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and he has transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption. We are actually free. The forgiveness of sins. And what is happening in Corinth is people are being transferred into the kingdom. And the tangible expression of that is they are coming into that body of believers in Corinth. It is a community of light for the people of a dark city of Corinth. And that's why your own hospitality of welcome and of friendship and of drawing people in with those relationships into the life of believers is so important. And I saw that happening at the eight o'clock service here this morning with somebody who is new. It's something that is critical because it is the way that people live out what God and his power has done for them spiritually. Transferring people from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, the beloved son. That's where freedom is. And that all happens because Paul is strengthened and freed to serve by the gift of other churches, by Timothy and Silas and by Aquila and Priscilla. And I believe that this is happening here in a wonderful way at Messiah Church.

One of the ways that I see your interdependence is the way that you have trained people to go out into the world as ministers of the world as ministers of the gospel. This has been a long history. You are known as a church for equipping people to be leaders in God's church. Lay people and ordained people as well.

Not only that, but one of the reasons God chooses cities is so that other churches can be sent out from there with the resources that you have. So you of course have that. In September, I visited Messiah West with Daniel Avitan and saw the work of God flourishing there. You know, it's like half the congregation left because they were all kids when I was there. And it was a, you know, a lot of people in church that day. And I know about the struggles they had getting started in during COVID. But it's your interdependence together that allows that to happen. And George and I were visiting in PEI with Colton Carrick and Tiara and their new little baby too. And seeing God's work freshly started less than a year ago and beginning to flourish there. And here Colton is, part of your staff coming by the miracle of Zoom to staff meetings, being prayed for by you Sunday by Sunday and being prayed for in staff meeting as well.

And having that relationship, that interdependence, that frees them up, that strengthens them for this work. That interdependence is so critical in the life of mission and the church being in the city. Now the second thing that we see here is not only interdependence, but there is this call by God for no silence. No silence. No silence. There is trouble that gets going. Of course, when Paul is preaching the gospel, it seems to happen. What happened was that Crispus, when he was converted, it was an incredible thing, but it created waves as well. Great opposition from the synagogue. And Paul knows that they can stir up the leaders, and especially in a huge city like that, cause huge problems for him. It's already happened to him three times just recently. And he is afraid. That's where that trembling comes.

[ 23 : 12 ] And he doesn't know what's going to happen here. Things look bad. And into this situation, Jesus speaks to Paul. Look at verses 9 through 11. It is a deeply encouraging vision. And I hope you're able to sort of remember this vision as you leave from here. It's Jesus' own words to Paul. And I believe they have a lot of relevance for us as well. So Jesus says there in a dream, and what an extraordinary way to have a dream. But what we see there is that he said, Jesus says, don't be afraid.

He says, keep on speaking. And he says, don't be silent. And the do not be afraid is not the usual message of don't be afraid, which means don't be afraid of God, or be afraid of that angels that's speaking to you. Jesus is saying this, don't be afraid of Corinth. Don't be afraid of what you're facing

right now. And then he says, keep speaking. Because it's only in speaking that the light of the gospel can go into people's lives. That is the power of God for salvation. And then these wonderful words, don't be silent. Now, I think for us in Canada, there is a strong word there. Because I think that's one of the biggest temptations that we have as Canadians, and I experienced that in my own life, is the temptation to be silent. Because that's the pressure on you all the time. Be silent about Jesus. You can talk about anything, but don't talk about Jesus. And that's Paul's temptation here too. He's tempted to be silent. And Jesus says those things, don't be afraid. Keep on speaking. Don't be silent. Well, how can he do that? If he's feeling that sense of fear, how can he just sort of switch it off? Well, Jesus, look at what Jesus says next. He says something that we all know, but often forget. Jesus says, I am with you, for I am with you. That is so important for us, for you individually, and me to know, to remember every day. Jesus comes into your fear, Paul's fear. He reminds you and I why we are able to speak. It is because Jesus is with you. It's because God has spoke, the living God speaks to you in his word. You know those words are for you and I today, as we think about how Jesus wants us to serve him in this city. And they are words that we need to remember over and over again. It's one of the reasons you and I are here today. It is to remember that Jesus is with us, the living Lord Jesus. We read the Bible today. I'm preaching God's word. What we remember and see in the Bible, Jesus is with you. He is Emmanuel. When we are eating bread and drinking wine, we do this in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. To remember that his death and his resurrection was for the forgiveness of our sins, he is with us. When we gather in small groups, we are actually reminding one another that we are the body of Christ and that we belong to him.

[ 26 : 52 ] He is our God. He is with us. And so as God's word, as Jesus' words go into our mind and hearts in this way, it does, it pushes fear out and it opens our mouth to speak so that we are not silenced. God give us grace to speak. It's one of the things, one of the reasons why in our synod we introduced the word one-to-one, which I know is beginning to be used in this church as well because it's a great tool, the word one-to-one, to very simply sit down with coffee or one-to-one with a family member, with a friend, co-worker, somebody that you've met, a new person to the church, and actually go through parts of the Bible.

And it opens your mouth up to speak. And you're depending not on your ability to convince, but on the fact that God has spoken. So this is a great gift for us in helping us to not be silent.

And I encourage you in that. Well, the last thing that Paul talks about here, the key, besides that wonderful warm interdependence, besides this call by Jesus himself not to be silent, we see here that Jesus is Lord of the city. It is this confidence in Jesus' Lordship, that he is King. And we see that in the rest of this dream. Because Jesus says something which is incredible. He knows what's going to happen in the city. He says, nothing, no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many people in the city. That's the clincher for Paul. You see, Jesus promises to keep him safe because there are many in that city that Jesus is converting. He's already working on them. Jesus knows who they are.

Paul doesn't. And so Jesus says, stay and speak, because that's how the living Lord Jesus will come into their lives. Now, if we believe that Jesus is Lord over people who don't believe, and they don't even know that yet, you might think, and I've certainly heard this, well, we don't really need to go talk to people then, because Jesus is converting them. He knows who's going to become a Christian. But no, it is because that very reason that Jesus is doing that work, that you need to go. And you can go with confidence to people. You don't know who that person is, but you know that they are there. They are out there. And the call that Jesus says over and over again is to make disciples. You need to go out into the world because Jesus is Lord over those people's hearts. And often it is like Christmas, or like some of these people, you know, who are into their own religion and way of living and self-righteous, or people who are so far gone morally, the most unlikely people are the ones who were converted in Corinth.

And it's the same in your life and my life as well. You will be surprised of who Jesus has for you in the city. And certainly Paul obeys that. And what we see is that he stays for a year and a half, and many people come to faith in the Lord Jesus. Now, I think that when we think of this church of Messiah church, the Lordship of Jesus is something that we can almost dismiss because we see what's going on in the city. We see political power. We're in the center of political power in Canada. We see the power of wealth, and we see the power of Satan, in a sense, clouding people's mind. And we can become very unsure of the Lordship of Jesus. But Jesus is constantly teaching us in

God's word. And through the book of Acts, you see that the sovereignty of Jesus all the way through, in the way that Paul is directed, in the way that he knows what's happening in the city. And in this, if you look at verses 12 through 17, you see the power of the Lord Jesus at work in the judicial system. So look, if you look at that real quickly, God has this powerful provincial premier, Gallio. Look at this case that the leaders of the Jewish synagogue brought to them. And it's a really serious charge that they're subversive.

[ 31 : 32 ] And before Paul gets up to speak to give the defense, Gallio says, be quiet, Paul. I'll take care of this. And he said, this is ridiculous. This is an internal matter. And I'm throwing the case out.

And I'm throwing you out too. So he literally threw them out of the courts. And then what happened as a result is that they were categorized, along with the Jewish faith, as a religion that is tolerated. There was a category for that. And Christians had that gift in Corinth after that. The Lordship of Jesus in a very unexpected way there. And of course, God in his power gave them a large household right next to the synagogue. We saw the Lordship of Jesus in giving these wonderful people to Paul as friends and people who would provide for them. And you see this wonderful Lordship of God in that the worldwide church that has already been started gives money at the right time in the right place so that Paul could devote his time. And I think that God has blessed Messiah Church in these things as well. Like Corinth, you have faithful preaching. God has given that to you as a gift. He's given you wonderful lay leaders. He has given you a great place to meet, as they did with Corinth. He has given generous hearts in your congregation. And he's given you the freedom to speak. There still is some tolerance here in Canada for that. And there are many households here who believe in the Lord Jesus.

Jesus in his Lordship has provided this for you because he has many people in Ottawa that he is sending you to. Corinth and Ottawa are very similar to one another. There is the worship of money. There is influence, status, and sexual fulfillment of every kind. And that's rampant. And they are both successful looking cities as well. But in our cities, there are many people experiencing loneliness, spiritual poverty, longing, hopeless grief, and addictions of many kinds. There is sexual brokenness and a lack of real purpose in a city that looks very, very successful. And many of those people are Jesus' own people.

He is actually their Lord already, even though they don't yet believe. And Jesus' plan for Messiah downtown is that you would not be silent, that you would keep on speaking of Jesus who is Savior and Lord.

[ 34 : 17 ] Because when people in the city hear the good news, it creates faith. Jesus the Lord heals minds and souls and relationships. And this is what the ministry is to the city. So I want to close by saying that Paul in this letter has said that the church will include people who at one time were defined by their sin. He says about Corinth, he says, they were sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, greedy drunkards, revilers, and swindlers.

That was Corinth, and it is Ottawa as well. And what Jesus did was to give them saving belief so that they heard the good news of repentance and forgiveness of sins by Jesus. And Paul said, you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God. That is the power of the gospel. And that's the gospel that you carry into this city of Ottawa. That is the light that each of you are bringing. And so I encourage you to be interdependent, to help one another bring that gospel into the city, to encourage each other in it, to pray for each other in it, to pray for the churches that you are interdependent with, and for those who you have sent out, trained here in Ottawa. And I pray also that you would, that you would not be silent. That you would take the risk, knowing that Jesus is with you, to pray for that person that you might speak about Jesus too. And finally, that you will welcome Jesus' people, the people he has in the city, into this new kind of city, this little city of God here in Ottawa. It's a community of Christians that live out the gospel. It's the place where you are open about the fact that our Lord Jesus has restored you and he's continuing that work in you. You are celebrating here sexual purity, faithfulness to God with finances, humility before God, a love for one another that is a testimony to the city around you. May God give you grace in the work that you are doing for him and know that the God who has saved you is powerful and he will give you that power to be faithful to Jesus and his mission in Ottawa. May God grant you the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses here in this city. Amen.