

Acts 18:1-18 "Love is Deeper Than Power"

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[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.

Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would continue to fall with gentle power. Father, you know that your Word touches us in some ways, touches some of our deepest fears. And so, Father, you know that we as human beings often turn our eyes away from this or skip over it quickly.

But we ask, Father, that you sort of pin us with your Word and that your Word might enter deep within and that you might help us, Father, to walk towards some of these fears and hear the beauty and the glory and the wisdom of your Word. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Please be seated. So, if my wife was to be giving me a small present like this, she wouldn't just wrap it like this.

[2 : 1 0] One of the things which is really wonderful about her is she likes to make sure that there's lots of excitement in opening the presents. She likes to, in a sense, increase the wow.

And so, she would take something like this and maybe put it in some smaller box wrapped with paper so that if you shook it, you couldn't hear what it was. And who knows, depending on her mood, she might even put that smaller box in a bigger box and surround that with all sorts of paper and cover it up so that when you shake it, you can't hear what's inside of it.

So, you have to do a bit of a journey of opening things up until you get to the present, which is the whole point, or the main point of it. The Bible text that we're looking at today is in some ways like that.

It's, on one level, very different in that there's not just, you know, wrapping paper or old newspapers that you throw away. The stuff around the great present or the great treasure is all important, and we'll look at it quite briefly.

But in the midst of this story, there's a profound treasure, a great present that's given to us. A verse, two verses that it'd be very worth your while to memorize.

[3 : 2 1] And these two verses, if you're paying attention to my prayer, on one hand, they touch on something which makes Canadians very nervous and anxious, and they want to avert their eyes from it.

But at the other hand, that thing which makes us most anxious and fearful actually is the solution to another fear that we have at a very deep level.

Or at least maybe not you now, but at some point in time, you might have that fear. So, let's look. Actually, what we're going to do, if, Claire, could you just jump ahead to verse 9 and 10? I'm not going to leave you in suspense.

Hence, we're going to go with the big thing of the verse, and I'll explain to you why it's a problem or an issue for some people. Actually, for most people. And then we'll go back and we'll look at the story, just so you see the context.

And then we'll come back and look again at these two verses. So, and here's the two verses. Paul's in Corinth. I'll give you more of an introduction in a moment. But here's what happens.

[4 : 20] Verse 9. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision. Now, if you're like me, my version of the Bible has red print every time Jesus speaks. So, this next little bit's in red print.

Here's what Jesus says to Paul. Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent. For I am with you. No one will attack you to harm you.

Here's the problem part. For I have many in this city who are my people. Now, why is that last bit a problem bit? Well, the last bit there is a problem bit.

It's one of the texts which divides people who are more on the reform side of the playing field from those who are more Armenian. And that's because in the original language, it's not just that God is saying something like, I don't know what the wisdom is nowadays, but like, you know, 20 years ago, they'd say, let's say we wanted to make ourselves known and we decided to do a direct mail campaign.

And smart people could say if you sent that out to 20,000 people, there's a certain percentage of people who will respond and come. And God's not just saying something like that. He's not just saying, by the way, I've seen the future and these people are going to come.

[5 : 30] And the implication of the text in the original language is that they will come, that God is doing something. He will do something by which it means that they will come to know him.

That's why he can already call them his people. And that, of course, touches on our fears around, well, whether we have free will. And there's a whole range of fears and questions that people have around this, but that's what the text is saying.

So let's look at the whole text in context, and then I'm going to circle back after we've seen it, and we'll spend some time in this because, as I said, this is actually a profound treasure.

It touches on one fear, but as you hear how the Bible answers that fear, it shows you something about the beauty of God and the beauty of the gospel.

And it also is a great comfort for those who struggle with a different fear. So anyway, let's go to the beginning, see how it goes. First one, chapter 18 of Acts. We're back in our sermon series next.

[6 : 29] This is an eyewitness-based history of the early days of the Jesus movement. These things are taking place around the year A.D. 49 to A.D. 51, roughly.

And Paul, it's what's known as Paul's second missionary journey, and this is part of the story of how Christianity first leaps across this huge divide and enters Europe.

Europe is pagan, pagan, pagan, pagan, pagan, and this describes, these last few chapters have described how the gospel enters Europe. And Paul has just been in Athens. He's left Athens. He's by himself.

And he goes to the main city, probably the main city in all of what we now know of as Greece. And here's how the story continues. Verse 1. After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, and Paul 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.

Claudius was the Roman emperor at the time. And by the way, this is one of those texts, there's other things in it. And this event of Claudius kicking all the Jewish people, or most of the Jewish people out of Rome, we actually know that's true from a pagan historian by the name of Suetonius, who's a very important pagan historian, who talks about Claudius doing this in the year 49.

[7 : 57] It's one of the ways that we can date some of the book. So this happens after this. It's why maybe later on in 49, maybe early 50, that what Paul is talking about has actually happened.

Anyway, we continue, verse 3. Sorry, verse 2. Because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome, and Paul went to see them. And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tent makers by trade.

And tent makers not only made tents, but we'd also now call them leather workers. So he was both a leather worker and a person who could make, you know, from animal hides, awnings and stuff, to protect from the rain, but more particularly from the sun.

And verse 4. And Paul reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. So that's how the text begins.

By the way, some of you know your Bible and know that Priscilla and Aquila, or Aquila and Priscilla, that you've heard those names before. This is where we meet them. They're probably not Christians when Paul meets them.

[9 : 04] He meets them and works with them because they're both Jewish. But sometime during this, we're not told about their conversion, but they obviously become Christians. And I think they show up like almost a dozen times in the rest of the New Testament because they become, in a minor way, quite important people in the early days of the church in Greece and in what we now call Turkey.

They become, in fact, his traveling companions and very, very great friends. It's also really interesting, if you notice here, I haven't talked about it very much, but look at verse 4 again. He said, Paul reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath.

And I, you know, it's one of those things, you could almost make it a whole sermon topic if you're going and looking through the book of Acts. How does the gospel leap over these huge racial and language and cultural and geographic divides?

And what you'll see is that it's never by force. It's never by compulsion. It's always by reason and persuasion. Open-handed, public declaration of the truth and giving reasons in the hope that it will persuade.

That's how the gospel moves forward. So the next part, the next verse is very interesting. It's one of the things that the book of Acts has really helped me with.

[10 : 22] It explains how you should talk to a Jewish person or the types of things you should talk to a Jewish person about if they find out that you're a Christian and they want to talk a little bit about your religion, our faith, so to speak, in there.

So let's see in verse 5. Now just read this again.

Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. So what's happened is Paul didn't have any money. He was working as a tent maker.

Silas and Timothy have arrived with some financial gifts from the other churches, so Paul now doesn't have to work as a tent maker. He can give himself 24-7 to telling people about Jesus. And the heart of it, I was just talking to a Jewish man the other day, and one of the things I like to talk to them about is that we Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Messiah that your Tanakh, your Torah, promises, and that not only is Jesus the Messiah, but he fulfills the promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12, 1 to 3, that God, through Abraham's seed, singular, there will be a blessing to the whole earth.

And I say, you know, we're one of those non-Jewish people who've been blessed by the Jewish Messiah. Those are the types of things I try to talk to them about, see if they're at least receptive.

[11 : 51] Many times they're a bit surprised to discover that most of the New Testament was written by Jewish people. And they're even surprised often that I know that Jesus was Jewish, actually. There's been a lot of miscommunication throughout the years with many people who are Jewish.

But notice here that it says he was occupied with the Word. Just if you could put up the very first point, Claire, that would be very helpful. I don't want to spend a long time with it, but just every time in the book of Acts, you see, it's a very common thing for it to say that Paul or Peter opens the Word or shares the Word or talks about the Word.

So what does that, the Word, mean? Very simply, the Word is the good news that Jesus Christ crucified. Sorry, the Word is the good news of Jesus Christ crucified in light of the Bible.

And it's also the Bible in light of Jesus Christ crucified. That's what it means. That's, in a sense, what I'm to do every Sunday. I'm to open the Word with you.

This is hopefully what the Sunday school does, what the women's group and the men's group and the small group. You open the Word, and you look at the Word, reading the Word, looking at it through the lens, in light of the fact that Jesus Christ crucified is good news for us.

[13 : 11] It's the means by which God has reconciled people to himself and forgiven our sins. And we're also to not only just look at the Bible in light of Jesus Christ, but we're to look at Jesus Christ crucified in light of the Bible.

That's what the Word means. So anytime you see that in the book of Acts, that's what you should understand is what is happening. Now, the story takes a bad turn.

And those of you who've been following along with the book of Acts know that two types of things happen wherever Paul goes. And one thing is that people become Christians. The other thing is that people want to shut them up.

And that's exactly what happens here in Corinth. Look how it goes on in verse 6. And when they, that's the Jewish leaders, opposed and reviled him, and the language there is quite strong, they didn't just say, you know, we want you to stop.

The reviling means that they slandered him. They slandered him. They would have said untruths about him that they knew were untruths to make him look as bad as it possibly could be.

[14:21] They lied about him in ways that made him look exceptionally bad. And so as a result of that, it continues, 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, to the pagans. Doesn't mean he'll never talk to a Jewish person again, but it means now that the focus on his ministry is going to be to pagans. Before it was Jewish people primarily, pagans second. Now it's going to be primarily pagans and Jewish people second. And so, verse 7, he left there and went to the house of a man named Tadius Justice, a worshiper of God.

His house was next door to the synagogue. 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.

For some of you, when you hear this text, immediately you'll think of what happened to us at the end of June in 2011. If you're curious about the details, you can talk to somebody like Andrew or whatever.

[15:28] We came to the point we had to leave our building. And when we left our building, we basically went next door to our whole building to continue with our worship services.

It's a very similar type of thing as what happened there. Now we get back to our key verse, which we're going to return to at the end. And the Lord said to Paul one night, verse 9, in a vision, I mean, right now they're worshipping Aphrodite.

Right now they're worshipping Zeus. But they don't know it, but they will become Christians. Even though right now they don't seem to show any interest, they don't seem to show any, they're not even on their radar.

They will become Christians. And so one of the things which is interesting, as I said, this is a text which almost talks as if human beings don't have any free will.

Yet if you look at the text, this text is embedded in things that show that we do have free will and we're responsible for the decisions we make. People of their own free will seem to decide to become Christians.

[16:52] Paul, when he shakes off his robes as sort of a sign of judgment upon them, is implying that they could choose differently and they've chosen to slander him and oppose him and reject Christ.

And that they've done that of their own free will. That's the implication. And, I mean, you could ask yourself, is this just because the text is inconsistent or is there something else going on?

Well, we'll get back to that. You'll notice that this idea of freedom and everything continues on in the rest of the text. Look at verse 11. And Paul stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God, there's that phrase again, among them.

But when Galio was pro-council of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal. Now, just actually pause here.

This is just one of those little nerdish things. You know, one of the things, if you look at the text or look at a commentary that helps you look at the text in the original language, and they don't cover it literally in English because it wouldn't be helpful for us in English, but every time, every little city, every community, they have different statuses and therefore there's different political officers.

[18:09] And every time that Luke gets that right, and he gets it right at a time when he can only get it right if he's based on eyewitness testimony because back then they didn't have Google. Like now you could Google and say, what was the political structure of Athens?

And you could look it up. What were the officials called? You could look it up on Google. Google, but, or if not that, maybe the Encyclopedia Britannica, for those of you who remember what encyclopedias were.

But back then when Luke was writing this, there wasn't Google, there wasn't the Encyclopedia Britannica. They'll only know that if the truth matters and he was actually there and got it right because he cares about the truth mattering.

And there's this other really interesting historical thing about this phrase. I'll read it again, verse 12. But when Galio was pro-council of Achaia. Now Luke would have no way of knowing that because Galio is relatively well known in the ancient world, that there's actual historical evidence of when he's there, which is how you can date Paul's visit here.

And here's the other neat, two other neat little things. Stoics, Stoicism's very popular right now, especially among men. But in general, it's very, very popular.

[19 : 21] Galio's brother was one of the famous Stoic philosophers named Seneca. And here's the other thing, which is very interesting, that both Galio and Paul, for different reasons obviously, would be both killed by Nero within 12 months of each other in about 11 years or 12 years after this.

Just one of those small little coincidences, so to speak. Luke wouldn't know any of this when he's writing it. He wouldn't know that Seneca is still known as a Stoic philosopher. But anyway, just one of those little asides some of you might appreciate.

I'll read that verse again, verse 12. But when Galio was pro-council of Achaia, the Jewish leaders made a united attack on Paul and brought Paul before the tribunal saying, this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.

Now, by the way, in Roman time, there was, in fact, laws about how you were allowed to worship and who you were allowed to worship.

And the entire Roman Empire was pagan. The one exception to that were Jewish people who, of course, weren't pagans. They believed there was only one God. And there had been an exemption made for the Jewish people by the Roman emperors, allowing them to worship in their own, you know, from a pagan point of view, illogical, stupid, foolish, unlearned way.

[20 : 52] But they were allowed to do it. And so they're accusing Paul of, in a sense, inventing a new religion. And because this is being decided at a very high level in an official Roman colony by a pro-council, a person whose dad was famous, his brother's famous, how Galio rules on this could have a huge impact legally on how Christians were viewed over the next, over quite a few more years.

It's a very different situation than, in a sense, the other things that Paul was doing. It would be like getting a bit of a misdemeanor where you call bylaw on it and you get fined for, you know, making too much noise at night or something.

This is a very, very different type of charge, which is probably why it's in the Bible. To read verse 13 again, this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.

So it doesn't mean contrary. They don't mean it contrary to our law. They mean contrary to Roman law. But verse 14, but when Paul was about to open his mouth to defend himself, Galio said to the Jewish leaders, if it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint.

But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourself, I refuse to be a judge of those things. And he drove them from the tribunal and they all see Sosthenes, the new ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal.

[22 : 18] But Galio paid no attention to any of these things. And then verse 18, Paul stayed many days longer, took his leave, and begins his journey home. And that's what the next few verses say.

So basically what, this is very important to look. It's probably why it's in there. There's been a very high level legal decision made that from that Roman official's point of view, Christianity is a version of Judaism.

Therefore, it's covered by the exemptions that Jewish people have allowing them to worship. It's a very, very big deal. There's a couple of lawyers in the congregation. You can ask them about precedence and how that would work.

And they'll tell you this becomes a very big thing. Now, there's the text. It's a very interesting text. It implies that the Jewish people are responsible for making this case. Galio is freely responsible for making his answer.

People accepting and receiving, that's all on them. Yet at the same time, there seems to be this idea that there's this lack of free will and God's sovereignty that some people are going to become Christians.

[23 : 21] How does it all fit together? Well, let's look again at verse 9 and 10. Do not be afraid, but go on speaking. Do not be silent, 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.

Now, I'm not going to explain the whole issue. I'm just going to give you a couple of hints or clues about how to understand this text. First one, if you put a point to, that would be helpful.

The first thing is to take a breath and just pause for a moment. All systems of thought, every system of thought, doesn't matter if you're a Buddhist, if you're a Hindu, if you're a Muslim, it doesn't matter if you're Richard Dawkins, it doesn't matter if you're the New Age person, it doesn't matter if you have some type of boutique, curated type of putting together a spiritual teaching, it doesn't matter who you are, all systems of thought have to account for the mystery of unstoppable external force and real internal freedom.

Everybody has to account for it. The thing which is unique about Christianity is it's right in your face. Texts like this and other texts which I've talked about in other weeks, it's right in your face.

You see it. If you are interested, go to the Dig and Delve website. I've shared this before. And go and look up Os Guinness having a conversation right on this stage with an atheist philosopher chosen by the Atheist Club of Ottawa, the Atheist Organization of Ottawa.

[24 : 53] And they had a conversation about the meaning of life. And one of the things which is very unique in that is he acknowledges that from his point of view, there is no meaning to life and there is no freedom.

He acknowledges it. You can tell it really bothered the atheists in the room. But he just said, listen, if all you have is matter and motion and that's all you have, you know, at the end of the day, there's nothing special about human beings and it's just, we're just the product of external, unstoppable external forces and we might think we have freedom, but at the end of the day, the freedom's an illusion.

And it doesn't matter and so I could maybe change and so only all systems of thought have to talk about, have to try to deal with this. And so it, you know, if somebody challenges you about it, one of the things you can vaguely say is, okay, listen, I'll try to give you my explanation of it, but you need to give me an explanation about it too.

It's not just me. And at the end of the day, the Christian explanation is by far the wisest, not only the wisest, but also the most beautiful. If you could put up the next slide, that would be very helpful as well.

And part of the reason that only the Christian answer is both wise and beautiful is that only the gospel reveals that love is the ultimate and basic reality.

[26 : 10] Only the gospel reveals that love is the ultimate and basic reality. But what do I mean by this? You see, all systems of thought tend to either see our current life as either a tragedy, something that happened with the one where the one is no longer the one, or, and even then, they tend to think in terms of power, but basically, all systems of thought primarily think in terms of power, some type of power.

And when you think about the whole problem of both power and free will, if you just think about it in terms of power, you're never going to be able to solve the problem because you either have to minimize the external power or to maximize your own or whatever, it's always going to be a problem.

But you see, here's what Christians say. Christians obviously believe that power matters, but only Christianity teaches the Trinity. Only Christians can really and truly say that God is love.

Only Christians. Before there was any matter, before there was time, before there was energy, before there was that singularity, which we now call that which existed when the Big Bang happened, before that happened, the Father loved the Son and the Son loved the Father and the Father loved the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit loved the Father.

And you could go on with all of those relationships and that what existed, God existed before all things and one of the fundamental characteristics of the God of the Bible is that God is love.

[27 : 44] And so before there's matter, there's love. That's why it's both most ultimate and it's most basic. Love is that which is most basic and most ultimate. Now there's a mystery about love if you think about it for a second.

And I know this is going to maybe touch on something that can be a bit upsetting to some people. But when you fall in love with someone, there's two things that happen.

And not just fall in love, another thing would be, and this is where I know I'm touching on some soft spots, tender spots, because there's many people who would love to be able to have a baby and either through not being able to marry can't have a baby or through infertility can't have a baby.

So I know we're touching on something here. But if you're to ask a mom, you know, the day after, she's holding this brand new little baby in her arms and she's just filled with love for that baby or somebody who's just fallen in love and they're just filled in love with that other person.

There's two things about love. On one hand, you feel most free and most yourself when you're in love. On the other hand, you feel most bound when you're in love.

[28 : 59] You are completely and utterly bounded with that baby. You are bound in a way that seems like the most unbreakable iron law. The same time, you feel most free.

Isn't that neat about love? So God, who makes all things including power and force out of love, has so made and woven human beings and human realities that power is real because he needs to have power real because he wants, he's out of the fullness of his love, not because he has any deficit in who he loves, but out of the fullness of his love, he creates beings who can love each other and can love him.

And if you're going to love each other and you're going to love him, you have to have the dignity of causality and you can't have the dignity of being able to cause things if there's not a world of cause and effect. And God has so woven things together that there is both in fact true cause and effect and there is in fact at the same time true human freedom.

And it's a mystery about how it is that God has woven that that at the same time that we can say that George, God can say to George, George, you freely sinned. You freely did that.

You can't pass that off on me. You can't pass that off on your parents. You can't pass that off on genetics. You did it of your own free will. And that's going to be completely and utterly true.

[30 : 25] But here's the other thing about the text. Remember I said on one hand it touches upon something which we're afraid of which is losing our freedom. But it's also this text, you know, listen to it again when it says I have many in this city who are my people.

I keep speaking because there are many people in this city who are my people. If you could put up the fourth point that would be very helpful. The Lord sees you woos you and draws you to himself. Now, I go to the Starbucks in Bell's Corners. I don't normally do any product placement but I go to that place just about every day of the week other than Sunday.

I go to do sermon prep and sometimes some other work there in the morning. So I'm a regular, regular, regular, regular. In fact, I'm such a regular that I pay for my coffee with a registered card and if you pay for your coffee with a registered card at Starbucks, you get free refills.

And so I'll buy my tall, black coffee with no room and after I've been there for 45 minutes or an hour or whatever, I'll go to get my refill and I always get a Mint Majesty tea grande size with one Splenda.

[31 : 38] And I'm such a regular that sometimes the baristas, when they see me in there, they get my tea prepped in advance for me with George written on it.

I'm not making this up. And they have the Splenda in it and the two tea bags and it's Mint Majesty and it's a grande. And so when I get up, there it is, two little eyes and a smile.

It says George and I get my tea refill very, very quickly. But sometimes, this happened to me just the other day, I'd been in there for 45 minutes, 50 minutes.

I go up to get my tea refill and the barista says to me, oh, you came here later than normal? Is it time for your coffee? And I said, oh, it's so hard to be an older man and become unnoticed and invisible.

I've been here for 50 minutes and I, that's fine. I can be invisible. I'm in therapy. I can be, you know, for it because it's hard to be invisible. Now, here's the thing.

[32 : 38] And for some of you, you're cute, you're vivacious, you're handsome, you're good looking, you've never been invisible in your entire life. But being invisible is a problem for many people.

There are people who would say that in their family with multiple kids, they always felt like they were the invisible child. That when they were in school, they were the invisible kid. That when it comes time to parties or dating, they're invisible.

People look right at them but don't see them. They're looking for somebody more important, more interesting, that that's the story of their lives. For many people, especially women, one of the things that they worry about is that they get to a certain age and beyond, they start to feel as if they're invisible.

It's a human problem. But you see, if you think about this text, what this text is saying is the solution to it. It might very well be that your parents treated you like the invisible child.

It might very well be that in elementary school and high school and university and in your place of work that you're invisible. It might very well be that you could be in that Starbucks for 50 minutes or an hour and they don't even know you're there.

[33 : 43] That could very well be the case. But God sees you. He sees you long before you even look for Him.

and He loves you and He woos you and He'll bring you to Himself. You might have been missed and invisible with everybody on the planet but not with the triune God, not with the Lord Jesus Christ.

So this text, which on one hand sounds very scary, is in fact opens up the whole truth of the Trinity in a whole different way to understand human freedom and dignity but also something about the fact that we're seen.

So now just, I have to start wrapping it up. Just a couple of things about this. Let's look again at verse 9 and 10. Remember I said it's a very good verse. It's something you should try to memorize. There's five different things. I'm going to summarize them in two statements but before that, just listen to the, here's the thing which Jesus is saying to you and me today.

Each one of us here, do not be afraid. And we know that this is a text addressed to you and me because it's a regular feature of the New Testament time and time again.

[34 : 57] Jesus constantly was saying do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. He doesn't want you to be afraid. Don't be afraid. Jesus is speaking to you and me directly, looking us in the eyes, saying don't be afraid.

And this particular, you know, thing, it, you know, many of us know that it may be a little bit uncomfortable. I've told people that, you know, in coffee shops that I'm a pastor and they were friendly to me before and as soon as they hear that you can see a change that comes over their entire face and the entire body posture towards me.

They're not friendly towards me anyway, anymore when they find out that I'm a pastor and we all know what that's like. And so it makes us not want to speak to hide who we are. But the text says do not be afraid, verse 9, but go on speaking and do not be silent, right?

Go on speaking and the other thing, don't be silent. And that's a message for you and me. And then it also says this, why, why, and by the way, you see, here's the thing about the Bible.

The Bible's not being foolish and saying, okay, don't feel what you're feeling. The Bible knows it. You know, I could tell somebody don't be sad. Well, me telling you not to be sad doesn't stop you from being sad. I could tell you don't be afraid and you're still afraid.

[36 : 06] Like, that doesn't mean anything. The importance of that text isn't that real Christians aren't afraid. It is that God knows you're afraid. Jesus knows you're afraid. Otherwise, he wouldn't say to you, don't be afraid.

And the point is, and so therefore, you know, you're a terrible, lousy human being and a completely horrible seventh-rate Christian, not even second-rate. No, no, it's not what he's saying. It means that there's an invitation for me to come to him with the fact that I'm afraid.

And he's not telling me to stop. He's telling me to look at two other things instead in a comfort that he knows me. You see, it says, do not be afraid, but go on speaking, do not be silent.

And here's the thing, the first thing to look at, for I am with you. I am with you. It's a profound freedom. Lord, I'm afraid to share the gospel with that person or I'm afraid for whatever it is.

I'm afraid to say something that might offend. I'm afraid. Or, you know, I'm just afraid about all these things that we're afraid of and we can come to him and say, Lord, I'm afraid.

[37 : 09] And this is an invitation for us not to stop looking at our fear as much as to look at the fact that he is with you. Jesus is saying, I am with you.

It's an invitation for George to say, you know, Lord, I'm afraid of doing this. I'm afraid of that. I'm afraid of this happening. Help me to bring home to my heart that you're with me. I'm not going to face it alone.

The next part's going to have to be nuanced. And it says, and no one will attack you and harm you. Now, why does this have to be nuanced? Well, it has to be nuanced. All of the three things that we've said before and the next thing are all things that are in the New Testament.

I think they're general commands all put beautifully together here in this text. But if you read all of the New Testament, you do know that, in fact, it's not the case that you won't get attacked and harmed.

There's already been Christian martyrs. Paul himself, if you read 2 Timothy, he confesses, he says, in effect, I know I've been delivered many times from prison, but I've come to understand that this time, after I see my next trial, I'll be killed.

[38 : 21] This is the end for me. So how we are to understand this text is to understand it in light of Daniel chapter 3. There's a very, very beautiful and powerful story in Daniel chapter 3 that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are three Jewish men in the employ of the emperor Nebuchadnezzar.

And Nebuchadnezzar decides that all of his officials are going to have to worship the idol. And so Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are going to, they make the sound to start worshipping. Everybody worships.

Three dudes are left standing up, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Everybody's mad at them. The king threatens them. He says, you realize that if you don't bow down and worship, I am going to kill you.

And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego say this memorable phrase to Nebuchadnezzar. He looks at Nebuchadnezzar and says, we believe that our Lord, our God, can deliver us.

But if not. But if not. We will not worship.

[39 : 23] We will die. And that's how we're to understand this. When we're attacked, we can pray. The Lord can deliver you. It might be that he won't.

So in the back of our mind, it's but if not. And then this final thing is I have many in the city who are my people. That's why it's worth our while to tell our kids about the gospel, to tell their friends, to tell our coworkers, just to bear witness to Jesus because God has people in this city.

Unless you've come to the sense that this is Ottawa is Sodom and Gomorrah and no Christian should presume upon that, that's a terrible thing to presume, there are people in this city, despite the fact that they seem disinterested or maybe even hostile to the gospel, there are people in this city who are going to become Christians.

That's why we should speak the gospel. That's why people like our brother B over there will go to closed nations to tell people about Jesus because, right brother, there are people in that place who God has called for himself.

And it doesn't depend upon our skill. It's a wonderful truth of the gospel. So just in closing, two different things up here to help put this together. If you could put up number five. I thought of making it longer, but I thought I'd bring the two aspects out in two different sentences.

[40 : 38] And if you want, you can take a screenshot or it can be online. I send these words to Josiah later. the Lord can deliver you, but if not, do not be afraid, for he is with you.

And there are many people, there are many people, I can't read my writing. There are many people in this city who will become Christians.

Whatever that is, you can see it. The Lord can deliver you, but if not, do not be afraid. You lose your job, you get a demotion, or you don't get the promotion.

He didn't deliver you. Don't be afraid. He is with you. There are many people in this city who will become Christians. You could go about number six, that would be helpful. The Lord can deliver you, but if not, go on speaking, and do not be silent, for he is with you.

And there are many people in this city who will become Christians. That's the message of this very, very, very profound text. Do not be afraid, but go on speaking.

[41 : 48] Do not be silent, 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. Let's stand. Bow our heads in prayer.

Father, you know that some of us are struggling with invisibility, with feeling unseen. Some of us, Father, may be worried that we're entering into a time of our lives where we will be increasingly unseen.

That one that people sort of know there might be a body there, but they're really looking around for somebody more interesting, more important, more fun, more hip, more cool, whatever. And so, Father, we give you thanks and praise for this profound truth that you see us, that you see us, that you know us, that you wooed us, and that you brought us to yourself.

And we ask, Father, that you help this to be a truth that comes home to our heart, that Jesus is with us. Father, you know the things we're afraid of.

Help us to be honest and come to you with our fears, and we ask that you help us not to think about the fear, but to, although it's there, but to focus on you were with us and that you will use us and

that these things are true, Father.

[43 : 12] And so we should take steps of faith. And, Father, we thank you for Jesus, that he is Jesus Christ crucified, that he is the means by which our sins are forgiven and we are made right with him.

He is the means, the true revealing of the depth of love of the Trinity, that Jesus, out of love for us, died for us so that we can be made right with you and forgiven.

So, Father, keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ crucified, that he is with us, that he has saved us, that he will never abandon us or forsake us or let us go.

And as these truths become more real to our hearts, grant us courage and boldness to live for you.

And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.