

# PM Acts 18:1-18a "I have many in this city"

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[ 0 : 00 ] God's word is from Acts 18. I'm going to read from the beginning, verse 1, down to halfway through verse 18.

! Acts chapter 18, from verse 1. After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.

And he went to see them. And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tent makers by trade.

And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

[ 1 : 36 ] And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be on your own heads.

I am innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titus Justus, a worshipper 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. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and 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. And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

[ 2 : 58 ] But when Galio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul, and brought him before the tribunal, saying, This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.

But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Galio said to the Jews, 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 yourselves, I refuse to be judge of these things.

And he drove them from the tribunal. And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal.

But Galio paid no attention to any of this. After this, Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brothers, and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.

[ 4 : 16 ] We'll come back to that passage. I ask you to turn, please, to Acts chapter 18.

Continuing with my series on the missionary journeys of Paul. We've come now to Corinth. I'll read again by way of text, verse 9.

And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you.

For I have many people, I have many in this city, who are my people. All of us from time to time need encouragement.

Even the greatest of men sometimes can find the going tough, and find it hard to keep going.

[ 5 : 38 ] Even Paul. By now, Paul had been a Christian for about 15 years, and he'd been a missionary for about 5 years.

He'd had great success. But he'd also endured great hardship. On this second missionary journey, he had been imprisoned in Philippi, threatened in Thessalonica, mocked in Athens.

And now in Corinth, he's facing opposition again. In the synagogue. You can understand how he might have become weary.

He needed encouragement. And I want to look tonight at three kinds of encouragement that Paul received here in Corinth.

The encouragement of friendship, in verses 1 to 3. The encouragement of success, in verses 4 to 8. [ 6 : 58 ] And the encouragement of the vision, in verses 9 and 10. And then Paul's response, his continued ministry, in verses 11 to 18.

And I want to draw from this some encouragements for ourselves here in Dumfries. We need encouragement, I'm sure.

As we look around at the empty seats in our church. Well, there is encouragement to be found here in this passage. First of all, let me remind you of the context.

Paul and Silas have set out on their second missionary journey at the end of chapter 15. And since then, they had travelled about 1,500 miles.

Timothy had joined them at Lystra. And Luke appears to have joined them at Troas. And there, in response to a vision, they had gone over to Macedonia.

[ 8 : 17 ] They had preached in Philippi, where Lydia was converted by the riverside, and where the jailer was dramatically converted after an earthquake.

Then in Thessalonica, they had preached in the synagogue, where the Jews had stirred up a riot against them. They had gone on to Berea, where they had a better reception, but the Jews had chased them even there.

Paul had then gone on alone to Athens, where he had disputed with the philosophers. And after that, he has gone on alone to Corinth.

Corinth was a great cosmopolitan city, estimated population at that time about 100,000. It was a seaport.

It had a reputation for immorality. There was a huge temple to Aphrodite, towering over the city.

[ 9 : 27 ] But they also worshipped a whole pantheon of other Greek gods, particularly Poseidon, the god of the sea. But there was also a thriving Jewish community there, increased at that time by an influx of Jews who had been expelled from Rome.

And amongst them were Aquila and Priscilla. Which brings us to our first point, the encouragement of friendship, in verses 1 to 3.

Coming to Corinth, 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.

Went to see them, stayed with them, and they became tent makers working together. This decree of Claudius is mentioned by the Roman historian Suetonius, who tells us that the Jews were expelled from Rome because of rioting, quote, at the instigation of one Christus.

Well, that might just be the name of some leader of the riots, but it does sound suspiciously close to Christus, suggesting that perhaps the Christians in Rome were being blamed for the rioting that was going on.

[ 11 : 20 ] Aquila and Priscilla were evidently Christians already, and they were to prove a great support to Paul.

They became great friends, and they travelled with him later to Ephesus. We'll meet them again as we go through these chapters of Acts, and they appear in the greetings in several of Paul's letters. It's rather surprising, perhaps, to find Paul working as a tent maker, the great apostle Paul, learned in the scriptures, taught at the feet of Gamaliel.

What's he doing? Doing humble manual work. Well, apparently, it was the practice that every Jew learnt a trade in those days, just in case, so that they could support themselves.

We still speak of a tent-making ministry where a missionary works in some secular trade, especially in countries where there is persecution, and they don't have freedom to preach the gospel openly.

[ 12 : 40 ] A friend of mine, known also to some of you, worked in forestry in an Islamic country.

I won't give his name or the country because these things always have to be kept confidential. But he was working there, cataloguing the trees, but it was really an opportunity for him to hold Bible study amongst the local people.

And we trust some of them came to faith in Christ. Others, of course, have worked as teachers and health workers, all various kinds of tent-making ministry.

Paul chose to work to support himself here in Corinth. And he did so for a particular reason. He actually tells us in 1 Corinthians 9 that he did this so that he could make the gospel free of charge.

Greek philosophers that they were used to, they made a mint of money out of it. They charged you for every lecture you came to. Paul was having none of that. Salvation is free and he wanted to make the gospel free.

[14:06] And so he supported himself as a tent-maker. I want to focus, though, not on Paul here, but on Aquila and Priscilla.

What a blessing this couple must have been to Paul. He was alone, remember, when he arrived, Silas and Timothy had instructions to come to him back in chapter 17 verse 15, but they hadn't arrived yet.

It is not good for a man to be alone, God says in Genesis. We need companionship. Most of us need the companionship that comes in marriage and our husbands and wives are very precious to us.

But whether we're married or not, we still need friends as well. Paul could talk freely with Aquila and Priscilla.

They were on the same wavelength, as we say. They could pray together. They could plan their ministry. I imagine Paul perhaps reporting what he'd been saying in the synagogue.

[15:30] Pure speculation, this of course, but one can imagine the scene. I told them about that verse in Deuteronomy, but they weren't interested. None of them knew it. Have you thought about telling them about the verse in Isaiah instead?

I was talking to some of them the other day and I know they've read Isaiah. You can imagine conversations like that going on. They could sympathize with each other if they'd had a particularly rough day, either in their work as tent makers or in the great ministry of the gospel.

They could even help each other practically. Perhaps one day if Paul was particularly occupied with sharing the gospel with people, Aquila and Priscilla could make his tents for him.

We need friends today. Christian friends in particular. One of the challenges of being in a small church like ours is that there aren't many people to be friends with.

But we must make the effort. Those of us who are married and have our families around us, we must make sure that the single people are not left out.

[16:57] Those who have friends must be open to having more friends. Look out for the friendless ones in the congregation and draw near to them.

They need your support and who knows, you may find that you benefit from their support. Take away Paul's friends, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Aquila, Priscilla and all the rest and I doubt if he would have lasted a year in missionary work.

Aquila and Priscilla were a great encouragement to him. But then we come to another encouragement, the encouragement of success in verses 4 to 8.

Now Paul might not have thought at first that his ministry was a success. He began as usual in the synagogue in verse 4, he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

But they weren't being persuaded. In verse 5, Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia at last.

[18:19] You can imagine Paul saying to them, what kept you? They were meant to meet him in Athens and they never arrived. Perhaps they arrived too late and had to rush on to Corinth.

When they do arrive, they find Paul occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. But they're having none of it.

And Paul has simply had enough. When they opposed and reviled him, in verse 6, 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. There's a reference there to Ezekiel chapter 3, where God says, I have made you a watchman to the house of Israel.

And then he adds that if you warn the wicked, and they still refuse to listen, their blood will be on their own heads. It's a reference also perhaps to our Lord's command to the disciples to shake the dust off their feet if they were rejected.

[19:37] Paul felt that the Jews in Corinth had rejected the gospel, and therefore he turns away from them. But then something quite extraordinary happens.

In verse 7, he goes next door to the house of Titus Justus, a worshipper of God, in other words, a Gentile convert. And in verse 8, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with all his household.

What? The ruler of the synagogue believed. After all that opposition, what a sudden turnaround. And God can do that, can't he?

A person can be changed from darkness to light in a moment. Paul had been. There he was on the road to Damascus, on his way to persecute Christians, and the Lord arrested him, and he became a believer.

Something like that seems to have happened to Crispus. And it didn't stop there. may be encouraged by Crispus' conversion.

[ 21 : 01 ] Many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized. It's fascinating to think, isn't it, of the logistics of this.

A short step from the synagogue to the house next door, and everything changes. Such is the power of our God.

There is, by the way, a beautiful simplicity in those words. Hearing, they believed, and were baptized. Reflects the Great Commission.

Go, make disciples, baptize them. Too often, this sequence is broken.

There are many who never hear the gospel in the first place. Others hear, but don't believe. And others do believe, but never make any public profession of faith.

[ 22 : 09 ] Baptists, obviously, would point out that baptism here comes after conversion. Christian. But even if you believe in infant baptism, as we do here in this church, there needs to be some profession of faith.

Maybe it takes the form of taking communion, or of joining the church, but by one means or another, we need to declare that we have become Christians.

But the point here is the success that Paul had. Many of the Corinthians believed. How encouraging that must have been after such a discouraging start.

We live in discouraging times here in Scotland. In many places, there are small congregations like our own. There are churches closing.

When success does come, when someone is converted, or when someone new joins the congregation, it's a big event.

[ 23 : 31 ] Be encouraged when that does happen. And remember that some churches are growing, even in the UK. And around the world, Christianity continues to grow.

Paul was encouraged then with success. But then comes the biggest encouragement of all, the encouragement of the vision. In verse 9, the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, do not be afraid, but go on speaking and 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.

The second missionary journey had begun with a vision, that man of Macedonia saying, come over and help us. Here is another vision, to encourage Paul to keep going, and not give up.

Visions were part of the life of the early church. Peter said on the day of Pentecost, quoting from Joel, your young men will see visions.

And quite a few are recorded in the New Testament. There was Peter's vision of the sheet full of animals coming down from heaven to teach him that all nations must be accepted.

[ 25 : 02 ] There was Cornelius' vision of an angel telling him to call for Peter. Paul himself had a vision in the temple telling him that he must go to the Gentiles.

He'd had that vision of the man of Macedonia. He had this vision. Later on, he has another vision during the storm in Acts 27, when an angel of God told him that everyone on the ship would be safe.

And of course, we also have John's great vision in the book of Revelation. These visions don't seem to have been everyday occurrences.

They seem to come at key moments in redemption history. It's the Lord himself who appears to Paul here.

And he begins by saying, do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent. Now, we might not think of Paul as ever being afraid.

[ 26 : 15 ] He comes across in the New Testament as absolutely fearless. But he was human. Who knows what the Jews in Corinth might do to him.

He knew what it was to be beaten, to be stoned, to be thrown into prison. And he didn't want to go through all that again.

Again, we don't think of Paul as being silent. He comes across as the kind of man who won't stop talking. Once preached until midnight in Troas.

Go on speaking. He didn't need encouragement to do that, surely. And after this recent success, why would he stop?

But you never know what's in a man's heart. Someone who appears confident on the surface may be trembling inside. He actually wrote later in 2 Corinthians 7 of fightings within and fears without.

[ 27 : 26 ] He needed this encouragement from the Lord. But why should he carry on? The Lord gives him two reasons, each introduced by the word for.

First deals with his fears, the second with his hopes. Regarding his fears, he says, for I am with you and no one will attack you to harm you.

those lovely words, I am with you, are one of the great promises of scripture. It's the grand climax of the Great Commission, isn't it?

I am with you to the end of the age. It's implied in the very name of our Lord, Emmanuel, God with us.

And it's often given as an answer to fear. Think of Joshua, about to lead Israel into the promised land, about to go and face the enemy in battle.

[ 28 : 38 ] Do not be frightened, God says. Do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

God is as Paul goes into spiritual battle. The Lord will be with him, protecting him, and giving him the victory.

Think of Psalm 46, the Lord of hosts is with us. That's all we need, isn't it? God will be the promise here, notice, is not that no one will attack him, they will, but that no one will attack you to harm you.

God has his enemies on a leash, as it were. I'm very wary of dogs, having had a bad experience with a dog in childhood, and owners sometimes have to reassure me, he won't hurt you, but if I see a dog on a leash, then I'm not afraid.

Even if it's a Rottweiler, I know I'm safe. Well, the Jews in Corinth were like angry Rottweilers to Paul, growling at him.

[ 30 : 05 ] But here is a promise, they won't hurt you, I won't let them. Likewise today, the Lord's people face many enemies.

It's understandable if sometimes they're afraid. Sometimes they will attack us, but they can only harm us if the Lord allows it.

And even then, the ultimate victory will be ours. But then also, as regards his hopes, the Lord says, I have many in this city who are my people.

It doesn't mean by that that he's got many Christians in the city, though by now he had, but that there are many who will become Christians.

He's taking Paul behind the scenes of election. God has chosen a great multitude to be his people.

[ 31 : 11 ] He's sent his son to die for them. He's sent his spirit to draw them to himself. Paul is simply an agent in this great purpose of God.

He must carry on preaching so that God can carry on gathering in his people. out there in Corinth there are many, maybe hundreds, maybe thousands, whom God intends to save.

What an encouragement. Now Paul could have found all this in principle in the word, but the Lord is applying the word here to his own situation.

vision. And we need to apply the word to ourselves. We don't necessarily need a vision. I've never had a vision.

Don't suppose you have. But we do have the completed Bible. We can read that God is with us and be encouraged by it.

[ 32 : 23 ] We can read that God will protect us us. We can read that the Lord has his elect in every nation. Election notice shouldn't be a hindrance to evangelism.

It should be a spur to it. There are people out there as it were just waiting to be saved. How many? We don't know.

In Corinth there were many, that is the special point of the vision which Paul couldn't have known from the word. In Dumfries there may be only a few or there may be many, who knows.

If there were many in a corrupt city like Corinth, why not Dumfries? There will be a great multitude in the end from every nation who will be saved.

and some of them will come from Dumfries. But even if there were only one, that makes it all worthwhile. Finally, let's look at Paul's response, his continued ministry in verses 11 to 18.

[ 33 : 42 ] Encouraged by this vision, Paul remained in Corinth another 18 months, teaching the word of God among them. Trouble certainly came.

Verse 12, when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul, brought him before the tribunal, saying, this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law. What they mean by that is evidently the Jewish law, rather than Roman law. Gallio is an interesting character.

he was the brother of the famous Stoic philosopher Seneca. And he's your typical Roman administrator, just doing his job, completely indifferent to religion.

But in this situation, that works in Paul's favour. Paul is just about to open his mouth, and Gallio dismisses the case. says, it's just an argument about words and names and your Jewish law, you sort it out.

[ 34 : 52 ] I refuse to be judge of these things, and he drove them away. Violence follows, but Paul is not involved, protected by God, just as the Lord promised.

They seize Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, presumably he'd taken over from Crispus, and they beat him, but Gallio paid no attention to all this.

John Wesley, when he was preaching once in the open air, saw a magistrate walk by, showing no interest in the preaching of the gospel at all, and he shouted out to him, using the words of the AV, Gallio cared for none of these things.

the man apparently was convicted by that. Unfortunately, the great men of this world generally care for none of these things. But at least Paul was unharmed.

God keeps his promise. After this, he stayed many days longer before setting sail for Syria. He's completely unafraid now, happy to carry on resting in the promises of God.

[ 36 : 16 ] I need to ask you as we close, are you resting in the promises of God? Are you resting on the promise of God first of all, for salvation?

There are many people around the world who thankfully have heard the word and have believed. But are you one of them? Are you one who has heard and rejected the gospel?

Or even one like Galio, who really isn't interested? Your eternal future rests on that question.

If you're not yet a Christian, turn to the Lord as Crispus did, as many of the Corinthians did. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

And if you are a Christian, press on with the work of God, even in a hostile world. Whatever work God has given you to do, keep going, knowing that God will be with you.

[ 37 : 42 ] We need encouragement in these difficult days. I haven't had a vision that I can share with you to say that there are many people in Dumfries.

I don't know any more than you do. But we do know from scripture that the Lord is with us. we do know from scripture that he has many people in this world whom he has chosen, whom he will save, and he's given us the task of reaching out with the gospel to them.

Therefore, as Paul wrote to these same Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 15, 58, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

Amen.