

# Witness to the Lord

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now we're going to read in Acts Gospel, Acts chapter 18. We're going to read the first 11 verses and then focus particularly on the last five verses that we read from verse 7 to 11.

But let's read first of all Acts 18 from the beginning. After this, after Paul had spoken to philosophers in Athens, in Greece, after this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

They found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Emperor 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. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, your blood be on your own heads.

[ 1 : 19 ] I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles. And he left them there and went to the house of a man called Titius 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 they stayed there, or you stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

And may God add his blessing to that reading from his holy word. As we see there in the passage, Paul is that great witness to the Lord, that great witness for the Lord.

[ 2 : 26 ] As we see in the headings there, a very faithful witness. The servant of the Lord, who was utterly faithful to the call that God gave to him to preach the word. And in preaching the word, fruitful.

Many coming to know the Lord Jesus as a saviour and Lord. And fearless at the same time. Yes, perhaps in himself at times very afraid of those who were opposed to him.

But God speaking to him, telling him not to be afraid. We'll come to these points more fully as we go through the passage. But let's think, first of all, what we're seeing, even in the opening words of this chapter, where we read there, a faithful witness.

It was the great German theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who once wrote these words, that the cross is laid on every Christian, and that when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

And that dying may well be the martyr's death that certainly Paul himself suffered, and Bonhoeffer himself suffered, age 39, in 1945. But gently, the call to come and die, that's going to mean leaving your sinful natures, leaving behind your sinful natural affections.

[ 3 : 50 ] It's going to mean taking up your cross. It's going to mean denying yourself and dying to sin and dying to yourself and facing a world that itself is dead in sin.

And it's for you to seek to shine for the Lord Jesus, however much you're going to suffer in your obedience to him. And certainly in the case of the apostle Paul here, he'd been called, he'd been called by Jesus, called to die to self.

He'd been called to face the hostility of, well, of those who rejected the Lord Jesus as Savior. But Paul is following his Savior. Paul's going where Jesus is leading him, and Paul's going to remain faithful in that service.

He's going to die to self as he embarks on that mission that God has sent him on, that mission mainly around the Mediterranean and the Aegean seas.

And it's that faithfulness that our Lord and Savior calls each one of you who professes and confesses his name. Faithfulness in the face of opposition.

[ 5 : 01 ] Faithfulness in, yes, standing strong in the face of those who are relentless in that opposition to the name of the Lord Jesus and the church of the Lord Jesus.

And it's a faithfulness that God's calling you, even this day, as you take that stand for your Lord and Savior. And certainly as we see here in the case of Paul, Paul and his missionary journeys, you know, as you read through them, you see how that faithfulness that's in Paul's heart, faithful to the calling that he's been given.

You see that? In his true desire to preach the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul was converted, he was given that call.

Preach the gospel. And he'll preach the gospel to Jew and Gentile. And he's faithful, even through hardship, even through suffering.

But he's obedient, because he can do no other, other than to proclaim the name of the Lord Jesus. This little man with many physical ailments, and at times just a few companions in the towns and cities that he preached in, but he's undaunted, undaunted in the task that God had given him.

[ 6 : 27 ] As we noticed last Lord's Day morning, those of you who are worshipping here, when Paul came from Athens to Corinth, Paul was very much on his own initially anyway.

But in God's providence, God gives him companions, Priscilla and Aquila. It's a great city, three quarters of a million people. So few in that city who at first know the Lord Jesus.

But notwithstanding, Paul still will preach the name of the Lord in that enormous city, that great city. Despite all the hostilities around, he's going to remain faithful.

In fact, we read there in verse 6, when the Jews in the synagogue, when they opposed his message, Paul remains faithful. In fact, Paul is going to preach, not simply to Jew only, but to the Gentiles.

And even in these words of, we might say, introduction, there's an encouragement. And it's encouragement to you, an encouragement to me, to continue in that gospel witness that God has called you to proclaim.

[ 7 : 41 ] If you know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, he's called you and bid you come and die. Now, none of you, none of us are promised a straightforward passage into glory.

Because as Jesus said, there's a narrow road to walk. But as Lord Jesus was with Paul in Paul's ministry, in Paul's mission work, so the same Lord Jesus is with you who call in his name, who proclaim his name.

He's with you. And he's going to be with you in difficult times, dangerous times, but the same times that God has ordained for each and every one of his people. And he's never going to leave you. He's never going to forsake you. The Lord never left nor pursued Paul in Paul's work, even in the difficult circumstances that we read more fully often in this passage here.

So this faithful witness to the Lord, as we'll see, is a fruitful witness. Look at verses 7 and 8 again. And Paul left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justice, a worshiper of God.

[ 8 : 55 ] 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.

So even though Paul would never again enter that synagogue there in Corinth, Paul wouldn't give up. Paul maintains that witness.

And, well, the opposition of the Jews is so intense, but Paul's still going to preach the name of the Lord. And so he does something, as you see, we read there in verse 7, and it sounds almost humorous.

He goes to the building next door to the synagogue. He's been forbidden to go into the synagogue, but he goes right to the building next door. And in that building next door, that house, was a non-Jew.

And it's to that Gentile that Paul's witnessing too. So Paul's going to witness now in private locations, houses. And not only that, you read there that the most wonderful work of God's grace, the synagogue ruler himself and his family, they're converted.

[10:06] And what we're seeing then is God's blessing in Paul's ministry. This is a fruitful ministry. The Holy Spirit's been applying the word that Paul's preached, and many are being saved.

And so what are we seeing here? We're seeing that Paul's witness, his ministry, we might say, is using every opportunity that God gives him. He's been stopped from going into the synagogue, so he goes to the building next door.

Right beside the very place where he's been rejected, Paul continues his work. Paul's making the most of every opportunity to declare the name of Jesus.

And for every person, for you, for me, who proclaim the name of Jesus, confess that name. Look out for every opportunity that God gives you, even where you might least expect God to work in the lives of others.

Because these opportunities might be right beside the very place where one door closes. Because God is, we might say, God's the God of opportunity.

[11:18] And he'll open doors when other doors close. Don't pass by the opportunities that God gives you to proclaim the name of the Lord Jesus to others.

God has given you these opportunities to shine for him. And in the fruitfulness of the witnessing, the ministry of so many, remember it's, yes, under God's sovereign control, but so often it's seen in the most unlikely of converts.

We read there of this synagogue ruler, this man called Crispus, verse 8. I mean, he wasn't just a Jew. I mean, he's a leading person in the synagogue there in Corinth.

He's got enormous influence. He's got enormous authority there in that synagogue. He's such a devout follower of Judaism. But he's converted.

Not just him, but his entire household are converted as well. So Paul's faithful ministry has led to a fruitful ministry. Even the most unlikely of circumstances for the most unlikely of converts.

[12:31] Unlikely, of course, in human terms. And while we give thanks to God in saying this, while the gospel light still shines here in Livingston, and surely it's the heart's desire of the Lord's people for sinners to be saved here.

Surely it's your heart's desire to know and to see sinners saved. Pray that the witness of the church, by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, pray that that witness will bear fruit.

And that even in this, the year of our Lord, 2021, pray that God will work in the most unlikely of places, in the most unlikely of circumstances, converting the most unlikely of people.

Unlikely, as I say, from our perspective. Your neighbor, your neighbor who's, maybe for all the time you've lived where you've lived, who's maybe shown the most, well, shown no interest at all in the gospel.

Pray for that person. Witness to that person. The Lord's brought you before that person for a purpose. Or maybe a family member who's wandered far from the Lord.

[13:45] Continue to witness to him and to her. Bring that person before the Lord. And know that the arm of the Lord is not too short, that it cannot save.

Pray for someone you know who's been resisting the call to come to the Lord Jesus. Witness to that person. Witness to him. Witness to her by your word and by your actions.

Show that Jesus truly is the friend of sinners, the Savior of sinners. So don't let it be a surprise if that person you've been witnessing to and praying for, that person comes to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

I mean, if a one-time militant opponent of the gospel, such as Paul, if he could be converted, if a synagogue ruler from Corinth could be converted, if many of the people there in Corinth who heard Paul preach if they could be converted, and remember Corinth, that city of great pride and self, if people there could be converted, will not God convert people in our own day, in our own place, location?

Will God not convert present-day rebels? People such as myself, yourself, who at one time were rebels against God's word.

[15:13] People you've been witnessing to, friendly with. People who at one time liked yourself, like myself, who resisted the call of Jesus.

None of you are beyond the love of God. Now, we may well be part of a relatively small church and to many it appears to be a faraway place of which they know very little.

But God hasn't forsaken this church. The light, the lamp still shines. It still flickers, it still shines.

And, you know, we're reminded of the words of the great missionary William Carey, words uttered

two centuries ago but still relevant today.

Expect great things of God. Attempt great things for God. And pray then that the faithful service of the Lord's people even here, even this congregation and other congregations, that that faithful service will be rewarded by fruitful service.

Expecting great things from God. Attempting great things for God. Using the opportunities that God has given you, yes, to further the kingdom here in this particular small corner.

[16:34] God gave Paul opportunities there in Corinth. But as we said, it's not just faithful witness that we see in Paul. It's not just fruitful witness. It's fearless witness.

Listen again to the words of the passage, 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 in this city who are my people.

They stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God among them. You know, when you read of Paul's exploits, his missionary endeavors, sometimes we can be, well, falsely thinking that Paul was some kind of superhuman.

You know, somebody who had no fears or no struggles, no weaknesses. You know, that somehow this man of God whom God had sent to witness, to plant churches, to strengthen believers, that somehow this great man had no weaknesses at all.

But Paul was a man. Paul was a man, a human being susceptible to, well, to fears, to struggles. I mean, otherwise God wouldn't have appeared to him in that vision and told him not to be afraid and not to be silent.

[17:58] In fact, I think we noticed last week when Paul was writing to the church there in Corinth sometime later, Paul told them that he'd come to them in much fear and trembling.

And yes, he was God's apostle, but he was a human with human emotion, and at times he was afraid. He was afraid of the opposition.

He was afraid of the godless environment that God had led him to. Yes, seeing all the arrogance of pride that was so common in Corinth at that time.

And even in Paul's previous experiences in different places, he'd been beaten up in one place, been expelled from another place, he'd been forced to leave Thessalonica, he'd faced so much opposition from so many people in these places.

In Athens, he'd been sneered at by the philosophers. What's going to happen to him in Corinth?

And yes, he goes to Corinth in fear and trembling.

[19:10] But remember this, that where there are fears, fears in the hearts of the Lord's people, we have a fear dispelling God.

And Paul knows that. God comes to Paul in a vision. And God assures Paul that Paul's in the right place at the right time and that Paul's not going to suffer as he'd suffered elsewhere even at that point in his ministry anyway.

And God's giving Paul assurances. In fact, there are three assurances, in fact three commands.

Three commands that were relevant to Paul and his missionary work and three commands that are relevant to the Lord's people even today.

Hear the commands. Do not fear. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. And look at these commands that again through Scripture God is giving his people today.

Don't be afraid. Do not fear. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid of the spiritual and moral environment that, well, we're living in at this moment. Of course, from a human perspective, there's so much to make believers afraid.

[20:24] We're living in a society that we're seeing that's so ever-increasingly secularized. It's the same ethos today that was in Corinth 2,000 years ago.

The pride of man. The idols of our own making and choosing. The absence of true religion in so many places of influence. But don't be afraid of that opposition.

But as God's word tells us elsewhere, cast your cares on the Lord because he'll sustain you. You know, some people have what we might call low pain thresholds, certainly in the emotional sense.

You know, measly hurt, easily unnerved by the weight of opposition. Well, if that's you, well, pray for God's strength. Pray for that strength to endure even through these dark and difficult times.

And know that you can be strong in the Lord and the power of his might, that power that God gives you. And be reminded, as Paul was reminded here, these simple and yet such profound words, God is with you.

[ 21 : 36 ] Hear the word of the Lord, speak into your heart, I am with you. Because these are words not just mentioned here in Acts 18, these are words that resonate throughout Scripture.

These times when God's people were afraid, and God giving that promise, I am with you. God promised his abiding presence with Paul 2,000 years ago.

And it's that same promise that God makes to his people today. And, you know, all of Scripture is given by inspiration of God. All of Scripture has purpose and relevance and meaning.

But surely, some of the most encouraging words in Scripture are these few simple words, I am with you. I'm with you when you're afraid.

I'm with you when you'd far rather keep silent, when you'd far rather stop speaking in the name of Jesus. And so I pray that these words that were given to Paul 2,000 years ago, these words are heard today.

[ 22 : 41 ] and that when you go out even from this building and show the Lord Jesus to others that you'll be reminded of these words of the Lord.

I am with you. I am with you. See, God's not a God of discouragement. He's a God of encouragement. encouragement. And he's making his presence known, his love known, his presence known, even in what he gives to you in his word, even the words of promise that we read there in verse 10 where God's saying to Paul for his encouragement, I have many in this city who are my people.

You see, witness to the Lord. Yes, it involves courage, involves faith, involves strength, strong in the Lord, that reliance on God, your Savior.

And to exercise that courage even in the environment that God sent us that was so like Corinth 2,000 years ago. But remember us, you're not alone.

Yes, God's with you. They mentioned that truth. But there are many brothers and sisters in Christ in our land in our nation, even throughout our city here, our town here.

[ 24 : 06 ] Some months ago, I attended something online. I attended in person a few years ago, but I attended online this year at the National Prayer Breakfast from Westminster. And that certainly encouraged me so much because I was so reminded, seeing all the people that were online, seeing all that was happening in the country, being reminded that the Lord's people are scattered across our country, that the Lord has people in different churches, different congregations, up and down the land.

Yes, we are that link in the chain of the Lord's people, even in our congregation here. And certainly you might not physically see those who are the Lord's in our town, in our village, and wherever you are, even in our own country.

Paul himself couldn't physically see all the Lord's people there in Corinth. But Paul was given that assurance. I have many in this city who are my people.

Remember the words that God gave Elijah when Elijah felt that he was on his own, that there was, you know, no one else to support him, encourage him.

And God told him that there were 7,000 prophets who hadn't bowed the knee to the false god Baal. And give thanks that there are the Lord's people here in Livingston and across the country who haven't bowed the knee to the false gods around us.

[ 25 : 38 ] But are the Lord's people. Give thanks that we're not alone. And so be encouraged then in your witness to the Lord. Be strong, be faithful, pray that God will bless your witness.

Be fruitful, pray that God will give you the fruit of your labor. Be fearless in your witness. But if you don't know Jesus as your Savior, well, know this, coming to know him as Lord and Savior, your life's going to be changed forever.

We read there of many in that city of Corinth who were converted 2,000 years ago. They were rescued from darkness and brought into the light of the Lord Jesus.

And it's that same gospel that's proclaimed today that changes lives, that changed lives there in Corinth, even can change your life when you come to know the Lord Jesus as your Savior when you put your trust in him.

He's calling you. He's calling you. The same Lord who called Paul on that road to Damascus. It's the same Lord who called the individuals we read in the passage there, Tish is just this, this man there and this Gentile and Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue.

[ 26 : 59 ] These named people who were converted and the same Lord's calling you by name to come to him and be saved. Amen.

Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, as we cry unto you for mercy, be merciful to our land, we pray, be merciful to those who as yet do not know you as Lord and Savior. Be near them, Lord. Call them in that calling. May they respond in faith and give their lives to you, even, even in our own midst this morning. May there be those who have turned from darkness to light. So hear us, Lord, as we continue before you now in worship. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.