

# Provision for Gospel Speakers

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Date: 22 May 2022

Preacher: Davi de Paula

[ 0 : 01 ] Will you please take a seat? We're going to read together from God's Word now. Acts chapter 18 verses 1 to 17. Paul is continuing on in his missionary journey, this time into Europe, and he has come to the city of Corinth. That's page 927 of these Black Church Bibles. I think you might have some available to you. Acts chapter 18 verses 1 to 17.

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. 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 Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, and 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. But when Galio was pro-council 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 a judge of these things. And he drove them from the tribunal. And they seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Galio paid no attention to this.

[ 3 : 05 ] As we turn to hear God speak to us from his word, let me just pray very briefly. Heavenly Father, we turn now to hear what you have to say. Amongst the noise and the busyness of our lives, we ask that you would speak clearly and powerfully just now. We pray and expect that you, as your word is proclaimed and as the Holy Spirit in us works, would encourage those that need encouraging. Rebuke those of us who need rebuking. Exhort those who need to be exhorted.

And keep us safe, Father, as we walk with you. We pray and expect these things. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, let me ask you a question. Well, do you know anyone who you would categorize as lucky?

Everything happens to them perfectly. Everything works out. At the end of the day, we, Emma and I, we have a friend like that. We call him Scott Butterside Up Hamilton. That's what we call him because his butter always lands the right way up. He visited us up in Burkhead a few weeks ago. And we went for a walk along the pier and the harbor. And we saw dolphins. And it was amazing. It was wonderful. And Emma and I have been looking for dolphins for months. Of course they turned up when Scott was there. He just gets the best luck in the world. Now, I mentioned that to you very briefly because in the passage that we're looking at this morning, Acts 18, it seems like Paul is experiencing Scott Hamilton levels of luck, which of course Luke makes clear to us is no luck at all. In fact, what Paul is personally experiencing in reality, though it seems so lucky, is Jesus' sovereign commitment to the progress of his gospel.

It's a great thing that we'll get to meditate upon this morning. How does Jesus ensure that his kingdom grows? Well, the book of Acts has lots of answers to that question. But the one answer

that we're going to focus on this morning is this. The Lord Jesus gives exactly what his messengers need when they need it so that they will keep on speaking. The Lord Jesus gives what his messengers need when they need it so that they will continue to speak. That is one of the ways in which the Lord Jesus ensures that his kingdom grows. In other words, all we have to think about and worry about is speaking. The Lord Jesus is perfectly capable of taking care of the rest. That's what we're going to be thinking about this morning. We've got three headings. Here's the first one. Practical gospel provision for Paul. Paul arrives in a new place once more. We've already mentioned that. It's

[ 6 : 33 ] Corinth. It is the biggest city he's been to so far. Whereas in Athens, in the chapter previous to this one, we were talking kind of tens of thousands of people in one place. Here we are amongst the hundreds of thousands. It's a fresh challenge. It's a really, really big one. How is Paul going to make an impact in a place this big? Well, Jesus knew exactly what the gospel needed and exactly what Paul needed to make that very impact. You'll see Paul settles with Priscilla and Aquila, who he happened to meet when he arrived there, who just happened to be of the same line of work that he was in. And so he's able to sustain himself in this new place with some Christian friends. What a wonderful provision.

What are the chances of that? Not only that, did you notice why Priscilla and Aquila were there in Corinth? Well, verse 2, it was political persecution in many ways. They'd been exiled from Rome because they were Jews. Now, reports of the time record exactly why that happened. It was really because the Jews in Rome were causing a lot of trouble because they were arguing about who Jesus was. And so the emperor Claudius really had enough of them. And whether they were Christian Jews or just old-fashioned Jews, he didn't care. He kicked them all out. Indiscriminate. It was unfair. It was political.

And yet, it was the means by which Paul was able to sustain himself in Corinth. He had found some Christian Jews who were able to give him a job and money. And then Silas and Timothy arrive in verse 5, right on time. In all likelihood, they probably brought some money from other churches to help Paul so that he could really go full-time as an evangelist. Another really timely provision.

And then the usual happens. As Paul speaks about Jesus as the Messiah to the Jews in the same way, they reject him. That's powerful, of course. That's happened a few times already.

And again, as usual, the result is that Paul leaves to turn to the Gentiles. But where does he go? He'd expect him maybe to go into another district or another neighborhood or maybe even another city. But did you notice? He literally goes next door, next door to the synagogue.

[ 9 : 05 ] He did not have to go far to find others who were willing to listen to him. You can imagine him maybe as he's shaking the dust off his clothes, as he's leaving the synagogue, he takes three steps forward, and someone says, Are you Paul? I've been meaning to meet you.

I really want to hear what you have to say. Come on in. Where do you live? Just here, just next door. What are the chances? It's wonderful, isn't it? And the result is that not only many Corinthian Gentiles believe, but the synagogue himself believes.

He must have snuck in the back door, maybe hopped over the wall or something, I don't know. Now what are we to make of all of this? Well, here's one point, the point that we've been thinking about. God provides all that his gospel needs by providing all that his messenger needs. So from circumstances completely outwith his control, Paul lands in Corinth with Christian friends, with a job, with extra money, and a place to preach.

Isn't that wonderful? He receives what he practically needs to get the job done. To be an evangelist. Here's where the rubber meets the road for us, I think.

Ask yourselves this question. Has the Lord Jesus given you, me, practically, what we need to speak the gospel? Do we not have homes of friends that we're invited to? Do we not have colleagues who would come into our homes, would we invite them?

[ 10 : 48 ] Maybe they would listen. Are there not materials that we can use, either one-to-one, such as kind of word one-to-one, or sessions that we can run, like Hope Explored or Christianity Explored?

Isn't there this wonderful building that we get to meet in every Sunday morning where the word is proclaimed? Now, how to go about making use of all these practical provisions is a question worth thinking about and praying about, but we have lots of our disposal.

So, practically, what we need to speak the gospel is really there for us. Maybe we're a bit complacent about these things.

Perhaps, instead of praying and asking for opportunities to speak, maybe this week, we could give thanks to God for the ease with which, should we choose, we really could speak the gospel in really relevant ways to our friends, to our neighbors, to our family members.

Jesus will ordain and he will organize what needs to be organized for the gospel to progress and for his own to be brought to him.

[12:08] That is sure. And he gives what his messengers need to accomplish that job. That is us. Can we make use of that?

As an aside, moving on, a really encouraging one actually. These practical provisions that the Lord Jesus provides, they can even come from, humanly speaking, bad things or bad situations.

Remember verse 2 and the political persecution that led Priscilla and Aquila to Corinth. Now, the passage doesn't comment on how the Christian is to relate to tyrannical governments.

We'd have to look elsewhere for that. But it simply encourages us, I think, that whatever the government might be, gospel progress is never in jeopardy, really. We've had our council elections, haven't we?

And if we're honest, we might not like this party or the other. But in a sense, when it comes to gospel progress, it doesn't quite matter who's in power politically. Basically, the gospel is always provided for.

[13:19] What will be the outcome of these elections practically for Christians in Scotland? What will be the outcome of the discussions about conversion bans or free speech legislation?

Well, we don't know. And humanly speaking, there may be many challenges ahead. But how will the gospel fare under this government? Well, we have reason to believe as we look at this passage and as we think of various examples of the church around the world that actually it will still be provided for.

And so we don't have to be so disheartened at the prospect of opposition from political powers. Jesus is perfectly capable not only of mitigating their effects but actually using them for the growth of his kingdom.

We were praying for the church in Ukraine in our church prayer meeting a couple of weeks ago hearing difficult and hard-hitting reports but also wonderful reports of churches full of non-Christians confronted by the reality of the evil and the suffering of this world and their own mortality and thinking about what that means for them.

The gospel will be provided for and the messengers receive that practical provision. As was Paul.

[14:46] Paul was the recipient of much practical provision and if all of that wasn't enough Jesus gives Paul personal reassurance.

That's our second point. Personal gospel provision for Paul. Let's read verses 9 to 11 together. 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 or 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. Can you imagine being Paul for a second?

Now Corinth is a bigger place than he'd ever been before and he's had enough trouble in smaller places who knows what he might have had to endure here. He'd forgive him for being a bit overwhelmed perhaps.

In fact actually we don't have to guess he really was. When he writes to the Corinthian church later on in his life he gives us a wee bit of insight into his emotional well-being at the time.

[16:03] Here's what he says in 1 Corinthians 2 verse 3. Very simply he says I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.

Great fear and trembling. And you know though Luke's account doesn't convey anything about Paul's kind of emotional life in any detail it makes sense that he'd be receiving this personal encouraging word from the Lord Jesus in a vision because he was scared.

He was really scared. Remember God's provision for the gospel is God's provision for Paul.

Paul needed money he needed friends he needed a place to preach he got all that practically he had what he needed but he also needed something else. He was scared.

He needed encouragement. And Jesus knew that so he spoke to him. And he assured him of three things that he was not alone that he would not be harmed and that there were people in the city who Jesus would save through him.

[ 17 : 23 ] Now I'm not sure Paul would have necessarily expected that second assurance that he would not be harmed. That was part of the course as far as he was concerned. He'd already been the victim of beatings and false imprisonment and gladly so.

You can read the previous chapters to this. But it seems perhaps something had changed in Paul when he came to Corinth. Perhaps his resolve was faltering slightly.

Maybe as he remembered the blows and the shackles as he walked through the city gates into Corinth maybe he was thinking I don't know if I can go through that again.

It's understandable isn't it? And so how glad he must have been to hear that specific promise pertaining to his current circumstances at that moment in time when his conviction was faltering Jesus gives him the balm that he needs.

Be assured Paul you will be physically fine. What kindness in the Lord Jesus just at the right time. He knows what Paul needs and he gives him what he needs to keep on speaking.

[ 18 : 38 ] Now that second assurance may have come as a surprise to Paul that the first and the third certainly didn't. He would not have been surprised at the fact that Jesus was with him.

Again he knew that was the case and he knew of course that there were people in the case in all the other previous cities. I'm sure he expected that. but perhaps he just needed to hear it again.

I am with you. I have people to save through you. It's true that most of the time we all have practically what we need to speak the gospel to others.

we have homes that we're invited to. We have freedom to speak our minds and the culture and our society. We have church events. We have money that we can use to that end. But we don't because we're scared.

That's true. That's true of me. Is that true of you? It was true of Paul. So perhaps we need to hear again what we already know.

[ 19 : 55 ] So here's what the Lord Jesus says to us this morning. Reminds us this morning. Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. For I have many people in this city to save.

Amen. Why might we be scared? Well, firstly, because we think we're alone. It's really hard to stand from the crowd if you're by yourself.

And secondly, because we think that it could never be the case that my words would be the means by which someone might be saved. Let me tell you this morning, categorically, that those two things are lies that we are telling ourselves.

They directly contradict God's word. with you. Standing out from the crowd by yourself. And your words about Jesus can be the means by which he brings people to himself.

That is what God's word promises. And we need to be convinced that otherwise we'll let the fear and the trembling take over and we'll never do it.

[ 21 : 06 ] again, and if you're not convinced, let me just say it again. Jesus says this morning, do not be afraid.

Keep on speaking. I am with you. Do not be silent because I have many people in this place. don't worry about the consequences.

Don't worry about the circumstances. Jesus knows how to make the best of all of that for the progress of his gospel. We saw that at the start of our passage and we get another great example of that at the end of our passage.

The third point just now, political gospel provision for Paul. Well, the religious persecutors have organized themselves once more against Paul and you must be thinking, here we go again.

It's happened a couple of times already. I don't know if I can do this. And this time they're going to bring him before the Roman representative of the local area, Gallio.

[ 22 : 13 ] And really what they're trying to do is they're trying to get Rome to do their dirty work for them. Have a look at 12. Let's read that together. But when Gallio was pro-council 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.

Now the point that they're trying to make is that Paul is kind of advocating a new religion. You know, he says he's a Jew but he's persuading people away from Judaism into this brand new thing.

And that matter that Judaism was a sanctuary that was an approved religion under the Roman Empire and if Paul was an illegal religion, Rome might want to do something about that.

But to their surprise, and I think to Paul's surprise as well, Gallio just disagrees with them. He sees this as a disagreement between Jews about Judaism.

There's not a new religion being created here except for the matter yourselves, he says. Paul is not advocating for worship of a different God, he's not advocating for the following of a different law or different prophets, he's simply making the claim that the promised Messiah has come and that has some implications, doesn't it?

[ 23 : 33 ] But Paul didn't even have to say that, in fact, he didn't have to open his mouth or say one word. Did you notice this is such a great little detail in verse 14? Have a look at that. But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, Paul didn't have to say anything.

He did not even have to make his case. Impartial justice and judgment, a fair appraisal, that's what he got from Gallio, which is exactly what the Jews did not want.

It's a surprise, I think. You'll notice that directly after the beating of a man named Sosthenes occurs. It's tough to know exactly who Sosthenes is or whether or not he was a Christian or who exactly the crowd is that is beating him up. But to focus on that, I think, would be to miss the point slightly.

I think that this is the kind of thing that the Jews in Corinth wanted for Paul. This is the kind of justice that they wanted. And we've seen from the Sosthenes episode, that that is something that Gallio does not have a problem with in principle.

[ 24 : 45 ] He is happy to turn a blind eye to a beating. He does not mind that. And yet, against all the odds, he actually protects Paul from the raging mob.

Christianity is not banned, and Paul is free to continue speaking. Jesus knows what his messengers need for the propagation of his gospel.

He gives Paul unexpected political favor, exactly at the right time that he needed it. Sometimes the government, the lawmakers, and the justice systems of our culture and our society are a great means of repressing the persecuting mob.

Even in our country, Christians are often vindicated in the eyes of the law, relatively frequently. If you look on websites like the Christian Institute or places like that, you'll see many encouraging stories.

Now, that's obviously not a story. It can be very difficult to watch a man get beat up, and yet at the same time he comes to an absolutely right conclusion judiciary and politically as far as the Jewish problem is concerned.

[ 26 : 10 ] Nevertheless, we can be encouraged that through the inconsistencies of political powers, Jesus knows how to navigate them so that the best outcome for his gospel always comes about.

Galileo wasn't always fair. But he was fair when it really mattered. So, whether the political response today is negative or positive, whether the gospel continues to grow, sorry, whether the political response is negative or positive, the gospel continues to grow.

Whether the place is big or small, whether the messengers are fired up or they're really discouraged, Jesus knows, sure, his gospel message grows.

Hope we're getting to see that this morning. All we are to do, all we are called to do, all that we need to worry about is just to speak.

That's all we are to worry about. Jesus is capable of dealing with the rest. So, be encouraged this morning. I am with you.

[ 27 : 27 ] I have many people in this place. That is Jesus. Go and speak. Let's put together, shall we? Why don't we take a moment to reflect upon what we've heard.

and how it might apply to us in our lives. Father, we praise you this morning.

For the grace with which you treated your servant Paul, though he was weak, though he was frail, you gave him what he needed so that a church could be formed in a strategic and important location.

Father, we praise you for that. forgive us. Forgive us if we do not trust you enough with the matters and the circumstances of our lives and our world.

Help us to see that you are sovereign over it all, that you know what your gospel needs and your kingdom needs for it to grow. So, give us pleasure, Father, in being a part of that as we speak the gospel to others.

[ 29 : 09 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to... ..

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