

Trusting God's Presence in Opposition

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[0 : 00] What if every time you spoke about what you believed, you faced some opposition? What if everywhere you went, you talked about what you were really passionate about, then people started going into an uproar and trying to make things rough for you?

Or maybe your family, sometimes family don't even understand why you might be going to church every Sunday. And they're asking, why do you go to church all the time?

As if it's something that is unusual. How would you respond? Would you get upset? Would you get angry? Or would you stop doing what you know is right to do?

Or would you stand firm in what you believe? Today, we're going to be continuing in Acts chapter 18. We're going to be continuing to look at the Apostle Paul's experience.

He has left Antioch. He's come to Corinth. And he's been proclaiming the word of God. He started in the synagogue. And we know that things aren't going very well for Paul when it comes to his time with the Jews.

[1 : 11] Then he goes to the Gentiles. And this morning, as we continue on here, we're going to be looking at how Paul faces some opposition and how he encounters that opposition.

The amazing thing is, even in the middle of this pushback that Paul was getting from his own people, the Jews, that he stood firm.

And he got some support in a very unlikely way. And we're going to take a look at that this morning. And God is going to tell Paul, don't be afraid.

He says, I'm here with you. I've got this. Isn't that powerful that God's promise is what we have to keep us going when things get tough around us?

And just like Paul, we can grab a hold of God's promises and also his presence, especially when we face opposition. So today, let's look at how we can trust God even in the face of opposition.

[2 : 23] So as we think about how Paul has faced this pushback in Corinth, we wonder how it is that he kept going. Paul had the assurance that God was with him.

God was there. And God had the way prepared for him. And I'm sure he's thinking back to the Old Testament, how maybe thinking of Moses, thinking of others, thinking of Joshua, how the Lord said, don't worry, I've got this.

The battle is mine. It's not yours. And so Paul is continuing. So the first thing that we see, if you're taking notes this morning, is I believe we're shown in what we're going to see this morning is that we need to stay grounded in God's assurance.

Stay grounded in the assurance that we have from God that he is with us wherever we go.

Remember in the Great Commission where Jesus told his followers, he says, and lo, I'm with you always, even under the end of the age, because he's going to send them out to scatter around the world and to spread the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So let's start with verses 9 and 10 of chapter number 18. Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, do not be afraid, but speak and do not keep silent.

[3 : 57] Now we wonder what happens between verses 8 and verse 9, because verse 8 is telling us that many of the people in Corinth heard the word of God and they believed.

And then all of a sudden, verse number 9, God tells Paul, don't be afraid. He said, just keep speaking. He says, I'm with you. Luke doesn't tell us what happened, but obviously things had gotten pretty heated there in Corinth.

And Paul was wondering, is it, do I need to stay here or do I need to move on? And he says, for I am with you in verse 10, and no one will attack you to hurt you, for I have many people in this city. So Paul steps in at just the right moment for the apostle Paul. And we understand that Paul hears from God and Paul understands what is going on and why God is, that God will be taking care of

him.

So verse 10, verse 9, God says, don't stop preaching. And he says, let's continue moving on, for I am with you. This is huge.

[5 : 14] This is a command from God, don't be afraid, for I am here with you. You know, this isn't just a promise for Paul. It's a promise for us as well, that God is with us no matter what we face, good times, tough times, God is always there.

And it's really more than a promise. When the famous British preacher, G. Campbell Morgan, was younger, he used to read the Bible to a couple of elderly ladies every week.

And one evening, he was doing this. He was reading God's word to them. And when he finished reading the closing words of Matthew 28, what I had just referenced to a moment ago, he says, isn't this a wonderful promise?

And one of the ladies replied, young man, that is not a promise. It's a certainty. Think about it. It's a certainty where God says, I'll be with you no matter what.

I am there. And then God adds in verse number 10, and no one. Do you think this might have encouraged Paul? No one's going to attack me?

[6 : 28] Because what's been happening to Paul all throughout his experience? You know, people attack him. People throw rocks at him. And they throw him out of the city and leave him for dead.

Or they threaten to beat him. And so God says, don't worry. He says, no one will attack you to hurt you. He says, for I have many people in this city.

God's already prepared the way. He has a whole lot of Corinthians that need to hear the gospel.

And I want you, I need you here in Corinth to share the gospel.

Because I have many people who need to hear God's word. God's working behind the scenes. And this is what he tells Paul. So as we begin to break down these verses, we see a clear message that God's presence is our assurance.

God's presence was there for the apostle Paul. He can do the same for us. And that's the foundation. They can keep us strong. God's with us. We can stand on that assurance.

[7 : 33] Now as we move on to verse number 11. And he continued there. Paul continues there in Corinth for how long? A year and six months.

This is not just a short-term mission trip. So a year and a half, Paul is in Corinth and he's teaching, verse 11 says, the word of God among them.

So despite the opposition that Paul has faced, he continues to share the word of God with them, continues to share the message of Jesus. Now think about it for a minute. Paul could have easily packed up and left town.

But he stayed. He stayed there and he continues to share the gospel. He continues to share the word of God with them because Paul was focused on something.

He was focused on the mission God gave him. He was focused on completing. What did Paul say near the end of his life? I've run the race.

[8 : 35] I finished my course. Why could he say that? Because Paul didn't veer to the right or the left. He kept going. He kept his focus on the mission that God had given him.

So what does this challenge to do, challenge us to do? I think the second big thing is we need to keep moving forward in our mission. Whatever it is that we face, know that we can rest on God's assurance that he'll be with us so that we don't have to deviate from the mission that he's given us. We see this in verse number 11. Paul chooses to stay in Corinth for 18 months. He understood that God had placed him there for a reason.

So he continues on. And I think we see Paul experiencing many victories. In spite of Satan's opposition while Paul was there in Corinth. Now we know when he writes his second letter or his first letter to the Corinthians, we know that some things had crept into the church and there were some problems.

But by the time he writes his second letter to them, things are pretty well cleared up. So Paul stays there a year and a half. And even though it probably wasn't easy for him, think about the results of Paul's being there in Corinth teaching for a year and a half.

[10 : 02] As we had mentioned last week, Corinth was a big city. Corinth was a major hub. And many people would come and they would go out into the areas around them.

As was Paul's habit, when he would go on a missionary journey, he would go to the big cities. You know, he would stop in places like to us would be New York, Chicago, Los Angeles.

He would go to the big city hubs. He would go to the biggest places he could find. Why? The most bang for the buck. He could reach the most people at one time. And so here he is in Corinth and we see that he is making a difference, even though he doesn't think he's making a difference.

Has anybody ever heard the name Florence Nightingale before? She was famously known or she's been famously known as the lady with the lamp.

And she was born to a fairly wealthy British family in 1820. And despite some huge challenges, she felt a strong calling to be a nurse during the Crimean War.

[11:16] Now, wealthy British ladies, young ladies, did not go into professions like nursing because it was beneath them.

But yet she felt a calling to do that. And even though society didn't think it was suitable for a woman, in 1854 during the Crimean War, she goes and she faces terrible conditions in a military hospital.

Many of the soldiers were dying, not simply from getting shot or stabbed. They were dying from gangrene. They were dying from all of the... There were filthy additions in these military hospitals. And instead of giving up, she works tirelessly to improve the cleanliness and to improve patient care. And her dedication didn't stop when the war ended.

She kept pushing for better health care. She kept pushing for more cleanliness in the hospitals and in the operating rooms.

[12:27] Because it was during this time that not much was understood about microbes and germs. And so not much was... I mean, they would be without even washing their hands.

They would sometimes go to the next patient and continue on. And so Florence Nightingale's efforts improved health care tremendously.

She didn't give up. And just like Paul in Corinth, he didn't give up. He kept sharing the word. And what a difference it was making. Remember, God's at work. Have you ever thought about your own situation and thought, Well, am I really making a difference?

Am I making an impact? Whether we realize it or not, even if we simply impact one person for eternity, we're making an impact for eternity.

We may not be making an impact to thousands of people, people like the Billy Grahams and the Luis Palaus of the world. But we're making an impact nonetheless.

[13:34] Maybe it's in our family. Maybe it's in our work, our school, our neighborhood. Wherever it is, don't give up knowing that God is behind the scenes and He is at work in the hearts and the lives of those that we are dealing with.

Just keep pressing on. Because we see Paul's commitment. He stayed in Corinth a year and a half after God said, Don't worry, keep preaching. Keep spreading the gospel. No one's going to hurt you.

I'm here with you. And I'm preparing the hearts of those that will be listening to you. Now we move on to verses 12 to verse 17. Verse 12 says, When Galio was proconsul of Achaia.

He was the main leader, the main political leader there. And says, The Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat.

Now remember, Rome was the big political mover and shaker of the day.

[14:44] And many of these were Roman provinces. And Rome had leaders in these areas, especially where Jews were located also. And Galio being the proconsul here, the political leader.

The Jews rose up in arms against Paul. And so they go to Galio and says, They brought him to the judgment seat. Verse 13, saying, This was their accusation in verse number 13.

This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Galio then speaks to the Jews.

So the local Jewish leaders brings Paul to the Roman proconsul, accusing him of teaching things that were contrary to Roman law. Now this could have been a great setback for Paul.

What if the proconsul said, Yep, Paul, you are in violation of Roman law. And we're either going to put you in prison or we'll shut you up. Or we're going to send you back to Jerusalem.

[15:56] That could have been a great setback. It could have affected the mission that Paul had, that God had sent him on. But even before he could speak, what happens?

And when Paul, verse 14, was about to open his mouth, Galio looks at the Jews and he starts talking. It says, If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be a reason why I should, listen to what he says, bear with you.

He said, if it was a serious crime that Paul committed, I could put up with you. But what does he go on to do?

Verse 15, But if a question, or but if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves. For I do not want to be a judge in such matters.

And he drove them from the judgment seat. He says, case dismissed. Get out of my court. And that's literally what Galio does with the Jews who tried to stop Paul from speaking about Jesus in their city.

[17:21] And verse 17 goes on. We see the Greeks being involved in some anti-Semitism here. But what happens?

Paul's about ready to defend himself. Paul's about ready to give his defense. And Galio, the Roman pro-council, ignores him.

And he speaks to the Jews and said, If he'd have done something serious, I'd have done something about it. But I'm not doing anything about this.

What happens? God's taking care of it, isn't he? Paul didn't have to even begin to defend himself.

Before he can even speak, Galio dismisses the case and says, It's not a matter of Roman law.

In effect, what happens? What did Galio do? In effect, what Galio did was said, was, it says, As Roman, as the Roman government, we are not going to stop your religious freedom.

[18:37] We're not going to trample on your religious freedom. He didn't stop the Jews from practicing their own religion. And neither did he stop Paul.

So, if he would have come down and said, Yes, Paul, you're breaking Roman law, then it would have become against the law to talk about Jesus. But in effect, what Galio did was, Galio gave the Roman stamp of approval and said, You can speak about Jesus, and you can teach the gospel in Corinth.

And you can teach about the gospel in a Roman province. Literally, he gave Paul carte blanche to continue preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But that wasn't the end of the matter. We see in verse 17 that all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. Now, I find that unusual.

It was just the Roman proconsul that didn't give them their way. And then they go to the synagogue and they beat up the leader of the synagogue.

[19:46] So, probably the Greeks, this was not the Jews who do this, this was the Greeks who probably take it out on the Jews. Because if you think about it, anybody that tries to upset the apple cart and make maybe life more difficult for other people, so who knows, maybe that was one of the reasons why they did it.

But nonetheless, they go out, they take Sosthenes, and they beat him. And notice verse 17. It didn't say that Galio didn't know.

It said Galio took no notice of these things. Yeah, y'all can beat up the Jews all you want to. He took no notice. Now, if this is the same Sosthenes that's mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1, 1, then he too came to know the Lord as his Savior, because there is a Sosthenes mentioned in Corinthians.

And if that's the case, the Jews had to find yet another ruler for the synagogue, because the rulers of the synagogues were coming to know Jesus Christ left and right, because of what Paul was teaching.

So I think this moment's a powerful example of how God can work through unexpected people and unexpected situations to protect his mission.

[21:10] So God used Galio, the Roman government leader in Corinth, to effectively allow Paul to speak about Jesus and teach the gospel all around.

He ensures Paul's safety, and he ensures Paul's freedom to continue preaching. So what's the main point that we see here? Verses 12 to 17. Rely on God's defense rather than your own.

Rely on God instead of trying to fix matters on our own. Let God take care of it. Doesn't mean we lie down as a doormat, because Paul was prepared to give his defense.

Paul was prepared, but God saw fit to have someone else defend Paul's case for him. So let's trust God. Know that God is working behind the scenes, and he will take care of getting his will done.

The Jews tried to force the Roman proconsul to declare the Christian faith illegal, but instead of doing so, Galio did just the opposite.

[22:16] By refusing to hear the case, Galio made it clear that Rome wouldn't get involved in cases that involved religious dealings.

So the disciples had as much right to speak about Jesus as the Jews had to go to the synagogue every Sabbath. So it's a reminder that God is in control.

Let God handle it. Just rest in the fact that we are doing the will of God. I'm reminded of Martin Luther, the great reformer, many, many years ago, back in the 1500s.

He stood before what was called the Diet of Worms. Actually, it wasn't pronounced that way then. It serves as, I think, a profound example of relying on God's defense over our own.

By the way, the German word, the D-I-E-T is Diet, and it means assembly, and it took place in Worms, Germany.

[23 : 24] So Martin Luther didn't have a diet of worms. He stood before this very powerful assembly, and even part of the assembly, there was the emperor, Charles V, who was there, and Luther faced a whole lot of pressure to recant his teachings, which challenged the Roman Catholic Church's practices during that time, primarily selling indulgences and a number of other things, 95 different things Martin Luther took issue with the church.

And so here he is before this assembly, and they literally had the power over life and death. Excommunication all the way up to execution.

And here's what Martin Luther says in response to them asking him to recant what he says. He says, Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scripture or by clear reason, and he goes on to say, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other.

God help me. That was Martin Luther's defense. I can't do anything but believe God. I can't do anything but trust what God's Word says.

[25 : 06] It doesn't matter if it's the church. It doesn't matter if it's the government. It doesn't matter who it is. I rest upon the truth of the Word of God.

And I can't do anything else. So, God help me. Amen. And that's how he ended his defense. His reliance was on the truth of God's Word.

His conscience was bound to the Word of God. So, this really pivotal act of faith becomes the moment where the Protestant Reformation really got started.

It was a pivotal moment in the Protestant Reformation, inspiring many to stand firm in their beliefs.

So, like Luther, there are times when we might face opposition, know that God's with us, stick to our mission, and continue moving on, continue moving forward.

So, when we find ourselves in a tough spot, just remember, God sees your efforts, God's working behind the scenes, and He can take care of you.

[26 : 14] As we wrap up this morning, what does all this mean for us? Well, God's presence gave Paul the courage to continue on.

It can give us the courage as well. When we face opposition, whether it's at work, at school, in the family, in the neighborhood, wherever it is, know that God's in control. He's working behind the scenes.

And continue on the mission. Trust in the presence of God. Lean on the assurance that He is with you, even to the end of the age. And even though you can't see it, God's taking care of things.

Even things that you can't see. So, this week, I challenge you, I challenge us, to consciously lean on God's presence. Pray for the courage, to look for opportunities to share His love, and to share the gospel of Jesus.

And trust that God's placed you exactly where He wants you. Know that you're there for a reason. You're there for a purpose. And God does sometimes move us from one place to another.

[27 : 20] But God has a purpose when He does that as well. So, let's be a people who stand firm in faith, knowing that our purpose is anchored in God's promises. They are a certainty.

So, let's go out with confidence, knowing that God's with us, and God's got us covered. Father, we thank You for this morning. We pray that You would be able to use us to accomplish Your will on this earth, knowing that as we share our faith, as we share Your Word with others, and the truth of who Jesus is, where Your Holy Spirit can take that and can use it to open the hearts and the minds of those who don't yet know Jesus Christ, and that they can come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. We thank You for what You're going to do in us and through us. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.