

Encouraging Truths for Discouraging Times Pt. 1
Acts 18: 5-11

We have been going through and looking at Paul's ministry at Corinth. We realize when he came to the city he was met by Aquila and Priscilla, a couple who were forced out of Rome for the sake of the gospel. He carried on in tent making and evangelism until the arrival of Silas and Timothy who were a refreshment to him and also brought much needed financial aide. We realize the glory of God and the goodness of God in our brothers and sisters in the Lord. They have the capacity to really refresh our hearts in Christ. Paul now gave himself full time to the work of Christ.

But then opposition came in the synagogue and Paul symbolically shakes the dust off his garments and announces that he will now take the gospel mainly to the Gentiles. It is a pronouncement of judgment on them for opposing the truth of God and not responding to the grace of Christ. He made his new headquarters in a place that was attached or next door to the synagogue. Look at verse 7, **“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.”** There is quite a lot written about this man and who he is. Many think that this is the Gaius that is mentioned when Paul writes to the Romans from Corinth in Romans 16:23, **“Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.”** Notice he hosted Paul and the church seems to meet in this man's house. There is no way to know if this is Titius, or Titius Gaius. But you can imagine how the Jews who opposed Paul were not too happy that the church was meeting right next door.

The gospel through Paul's ministry was making inroads in the city of Corinth. Look at verse 8, **“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.”** None other than Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, a most unlikely convert, but God's Spirit moves where he wills. He and his household believed the gospel. This would have included anyone attached to his household. He also appears elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 1:14, **“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius.”** There is Gaius also. And notice others were coming, and after they believed, they were baptized. There is the order again. People get saved, God gives them a new heart and they want to follow Christ, first step is baptism.

Now with all the information that we have in the Corinthian epistles, and the information we have here, the ministry and the outreach of the gospel was still slow going and very difficult. We realize in this immoral city people came with a lot of baggage. We all have a lot of baggage in our lives that is being worked out in our sanctification. And we also find that Paul carried the weight of the expectations and the burdens and the cares of others. When Paul rehearses all the trials and persecutions and suffering he went through he says at the end of that list in 2 Corinthians 11:28, **“And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”** Notice it was on him daily. You can imagine Paul worry about the Thessalonian church that we saw last week. And now about many of these new converts and notice that it is “daily pressure.” We only see a small fraction of what is going on in the lives of others. But you can imagine something of the burden of seeking

to minister to so many suffering or struggling some way of some how. Many times the anxiety builds, and anxiety can be stifling. It can cause us to be overwhelmed. Those involved in the lives of others know what I am talking about.

Then there is the pressure from outside. Paul had been stoned, and then beaten at Philippi. His wounds from that ordeal have not fully healed. His body would have been forever altered and there is still pain in his movements. And now once again there is rising opposition. You can imagine the fear and the pressure and anxiety. Is it going to happen again? Public ministry and being a Christian opens you up to all sorts of defamation and accusations and attacks. And it really wounds. And it is often a repeated cycle. It has the potential of wearing you down. I can remember one such incident, and there was another individual who was helping carry this burden, and the individual saw the burden on my face, and simply asked — do you ever want to give up, just throw in the towel? And it is a searching question, because as we come to the vision given to Paul and the message, it seems that he is going through one of those moments. With all the pressure and all the trials that lie ahead, maybe it is time to leave.

Have you ever felt that? Pastors, congregants when the pressure gets too much, when ministry gets exhausting, when life gets exhausting, when this is not what I have signed up for, we often want to escape life and escape our trials. Here in this vision we have encouraging truths for discouraging times. Are you discouraged? The way we fight discouragement is not concentrating on all the difficulties or potential difficulties. That leads to withdrawal. That stifles any effort we are willing to give for the cause of Christ. No, we look in the Scriptures to what God has said and who he is. And if you are discouraged, I want you to hear this message given to Paul to encourage his anxious heart. And if you are not discouraged, this will certainly prepare your heart for when that time will come, and it will come. I want us to see four truths to encourage our anxious and often overburdened souls. We will need a couple Sundays to get through this list, but they are such a balm for our souls.

1. Be encouraged, you do not need to fear. V. 9a.

One of the things I love about this vision that Paul receives is that it is from the Lord. Do you see that? It is direct revelation from Christ. Luke records, “**And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision.**” The Lord here is the designation that is used of Jesus Christ. He appears to give him this message. And remember why these things are recorded in the Scriptures, not just for Paul’s sake, or that we would somehow look or crave a revelatory dream like him, but these things are written for our encouragement and admonition. They are written to instruct and encourage us. So it is not just for Paul but for all of us. And the words of our Lord here are not only encouraging but so instructional. They give direction of how we should think and how we should function in this very fearful world with so many fearful trials.

And look at what Jesus says first of all, “**Do not be afraid.**” It is a command isn’t it. Now think about it because we all know what fear is. Fears are something whether rational or irrational brings terror in our hearts because we conclude if we go there or do that we could be hurt or we could suffer or loss. People have a fear of flying, don’t fly because they see the potential of the plane crashing. There is a terror that enters their hearts. People with a fear of heights, will not go to high places for the

fear of falling. Fear of spiders — they will bite. Fear of the dark — there is something or someone hiding. Now think of what all these fears are — they are emotional and at the same time control our behaviour. They cause us not to do certain things and to do other things. We don't go on planes or climb a ladder or we keep the light on at night.

Now what does Paul have to fear? Well, think of the context. The Jews in the synagogue have opposed him and even reviled his name, and they also seem to be very influential and connected to the leaders of the city, as we will see in the coming verses. Therefore the opposition might be verbal — that is painful enough — but it might become physical. There might be dire consequences to carrying out the gospel ministry in this city. He can see the growing opposition. He can see the potential of greater suffering on the horizon. The question is what to do?

And we all have fears, and these fears have the potential to control us because none of us want to suffer. A young teen girl who is fearful of losing her boyfriend might do things immorally to keep him. She is not driven by a delightful and glorious fear of God but a fear of the consequences of losing that which she wants to keep. God knows that fears have and will control our lives. That is why the all fearful and glorious God commands us not to fear the things of this world. And this vision is a reminder of who to fear, who to be controlled by. The more we learn of Christ and walk in fellowship with him, the more we grow in what is known as the fear of the Lord. But it is not a fear that causes us to hide or avoid God like we would of the dark, but one which causes us to draw near. Look at the immensity of who he is, and look how glorious and grand He is. When our hearts are enamoured with him, it is amazing how the fears of other people and other things suddenly dissipates. God is really greater than all our fears.

And as Jesus gives this command, it is a reminder that there is reason not to fear. He knows the opposition Paul is facing. He knows the opposition that you are facing, the trials and pressures you are going through, and he knows them because he is in control. He is the one who truly is orchestrating all the events of our lives, and he can be trusted. Oh, listen to Psalm 118:6, **“The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”** And it is incredible when you think of the Lord's sovereignty and that he is in control how the command is repeated over and over in Scripture not to be afraid because that fear will cause people not to do what they ought. Joshua 11:6 don't be afraid to go into battle. The victory is yours. To Elijah 2Kings 1:15, go and speak to the king. To Elisha in 2Kings 6:16, when the enemy army is before him. There are more with you than against you. To King Hezekiah in Isaiah 37:6 don't fear the Assyrians. To Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:8, don't be afraid of them. I am with you. To the disciples in the storm on the Sea of Galilee in Matthew 14:27, don't be afraid — greater is the one in the boat than any storm. To the women at the tomb who see these heavenly visitors in Matthew 28:10, don't be afraid. He is risen. To Paul in a shipwreck at sea in Acts 27:24, don't be afraid, your life will not end. You will appear before Caesar.

Over and over again, the message is do not fear, and then there is a revelation. And the revelation is the Lord is in control and with us. Think of the things you are fearing right here and right now. It could be things in your marriage or for you children or you occupation or your health. And think how those things make you anxious, or lash out in anger or do things that you ought not to do. God's revelation, and all of these historical passages are given that we might know God is in control, and he is the

one who will do no wrong. He truly can be trusted. I don't know how many times in discouragement or in fears this truth of his sovereign control and love has changed and altered not only my heart but my trust and activity in seeking to make much of him. This command reminds us that he is Lord. We listen to him not our fears. And he reminds us that he is sovereign. Fill your mind and encourage your heart with the delightful, glorious and controlling fear of the Lord. It will not only diminish your fears but it will change our very behaviour. This world and the people in it become smaller but our Lord becomes greater. In discouraging times we need to not fear, here is the encouragement — our God is in control and he is with us! And that is where we come to the activity God has called us all to.

2. Be encouraged, God has called us to speak. V. 9.

Now the command here to go on speaking and do not be silent has to be understood. It is not a call to get things off my chest, the grievances or things I do not like about you. Often couples do that. They think God has given them the right, and they are representatives of themselves and not Christ. There really is no grace or forgiveness or light in their words, and there is no recognition of their own sin. Anger is just expressing our fears and trying to take control. There is no trust in God or his sovereignty. When Jesus commands Paul not to be fearful and go on speaking this is not an invitation to say anything we want.

Now what is the big deal about words? And the big deal is words have power. They can alter the way you think of a person or anything. They also have consequences, and once spoken they cannot be taken back. You cannot erase what you have said. So again, think of Paul. The call here to go on speaking is to speak a particular message. It is to keep speaking of the hope of Jesus crucified and risen from the dead. It is to speak that he is our hope of not only sins forgiven but to be with the Lord in glory. Now think the potential of speaking the glorious truths of Christ. People will come to Christ as we will see in this passage, other believers will grow and persevere. God will be magnified and Christ will be known. And God through his Spirit has used his Word effectively in the hearts of so many through the simple means of speaking or the preaching and teaching of the Scriptures.

We can all testify how blessed we have been through hearing, and hearing none other than the Word of Christ. Some times when we go out of service we have been humbled by the Word. It has pointed out the sin in our lives, we have seen our wayward way. It has exposed and changed us. Some times we have gone out of service, and we have been so encouraged. Christ is so much greater than we ever could have imagined. And we are praising him. Some times it is that slow and methodical saturation of the truths of Christ that is changing us from one degree of glory to another over time. But God is using his Word spoke in such a powerful way.

But the opposite that is also true, the more the Scriptures are proclaimed, and the more the light of Christ is shone forth, the more opposition it engenders. And Paul had in this city both opposition inside and outside, as we will see from outside the church, but also through 1 & 2 Corinthians inside the church. These believers would examine his life, some would come to the conclusion that he really wasn't really an apostle, in fact, when you look at his suffering it is proof that God is not for him but against him. And think, this is coming from inside not outside. And the public ministry

of the Scriptures have always come with opposition. And Paul knows where the greatest suffering and pain will come from in his life. It is not from just that he is a Christian. It will not be if he hides his faith under a bushel. It will not be if he presents Jesus as just an option. It will not be if in this sin saturated city he doesn't call out sexual sin, and call people to purity. It will not be if certain passages about God's sovereignty or election or about same sex relationships or about your personal offence before a holy God are never addressed. The Word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ is personal. And here is what you have to understand — words are personal. Words have consequences.

And I do think it is amazing that Paul is told not to be fearful, but right after that the thing he is commanded to do is the thing that could bring his fears to fruition. Now think about it, because it is nothing that you have never heard before, but our God wants us to be gospel light. Certainly we can be that in how we live, but he wants us to go further and speak gospel light. Now consider how different our lives would be right now just by these two commands. Do not be afraid and go on speaking on the glorious truths of Christ. Think of your marriage. If you are controlled by your fears and hurts about what the other is not doing or giving or whatever, there is going to be a way that you speak. And the character of your marriage has not been shaped by one grand moment but by many moments of your speech, how you talked, the accusations you made, the little complaints and big ones, the lack of expressing gratitude, the withholding of forgiveness, there might be no gentleness or kindness. And you might look at your marriage and say, how did we get here? How did we get to this place where there is so little godliness, so little gospel in your marriage? And the answer is through your words and fears. Think of how your marriage could be so different if you spoke words of light, hope, and grace exclusively — that were centred on Christ's great love for you. Think of the growth not just in your spouse's life but in your life.

And that can be so discouraging to look at and admit. But think of it, why did the Lord give these commands to Paul at this time? It was not to discourage him, but to encourage him. It seems he is discouraged, doesn't want to carry on at least in Corinth. And think of why God would show us our wayward way. Think of why God would show us our fears, and our sinful and ungodly speech. It is to accomplish something new. For Paul it would be the gospel light in that community; that he would speak the glorious message of Christ, that he would make known Christ through his words. And that is what God is seeking to do in your heart — it could be to be that witness at work, or be that testimony at home to your parents. It could be that you would in your marriage plant something new, and one of the ways we begin something new is by our speech. God doesn't show us our waywardness to discourage us but as a means of giving us hope and change. And as our hearts change, our words will change. Our words reveal the fear and idols of our hearts. So God is seeking radical change in our lives so that we will go on speaking the wonderful truths of Christ, the very words and message that we sang about today.

So how can we take these two commands from God and live in light of them. How can we overcome our fears and truly be his representatives of his grace and speak those words of grace? And let me give two ways based on this revelation given to Paul. One is to realize that there is never a place of circumstance or relationship that God has not planned you to be in. Often we say God has ordained you to be here this

morning, but he has ordained all those tough circumstances, broken relationships in your life. We saw this in last chapter when Paul was in Athens. He says in Acts 17:26, **“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.”** Who has determined the boundaries of your life and all the people in them? Christ. Your marriage is not a mistake. Your singleness is not a mistake. Your family and the people in your life are there by divine appointment. Paul, don’t be afraid because there is no mistake you are in Corinth. I have orchestrated all the events of your life to bring you to this place. God has one massive origin to destiny plan in your life. And he has proven through the cross he can be trusted.

The second truth we see here that helps us truly overcome our fears and truly speak his gospel and live in light of it is Christ has given us everything we need to obey him. Christ commands, and then gives the grace in whatever he has commanded. We cannot say, “I can’t.” So many are fearful of changing, of asking forgiveness, being kind to have those things thrown in their face, or to speak the truth of Christ and be rejected and ridiculed, but that is to be controlled by your fears. Listen to Acts 18:9, **“And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent.”** What blessed good news! God not only says we can overcome our fears but we can speak the truth of Christ in love. We can change. We can be his light in this world, in your life, in your relationships. So as you hear these words of Christ to Paul, it is so easy to be discouraged and even feel trapped in our fears, but the moment our Christ enters the picture there is so much change and liberty. Let us seek to trust and follow Him. He truly can change our hearts and the direction of our lives. He changed Paul and he can change you.