

The Blessing of Others Acts 18:1-4

We come to a new chapter and a new ministry for Paul — an area where he has not been before. Look at verse 1, **“After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.”** “After this” is after he appeared before the Areopagus in Athens to answer about the strange God that he was preaching in the city. He leaves and comes to another place, and that place is Corinth. And where there was not a church planted in Athens, there is one already planted in Corinth, but as we will see it was really tough going.

Corinth in many ways was like so many of our modern cities. It was a coastal city that boasted of great trade. It seemed that whether you were traveling north or south or even east or west your travels took you through Corinth. And because it was a destination by sea it was a cosmopolitan city. Most cities today are cosmopolitan. They are made up of rich and poor, people of all walks of life and cultures. But in ancient times the vast majority of cities did not have that eclectic make-up, but the main population was from that area. Now Corinth was also a very immoral city. It housed what was known as the Temple of Aphrodite or Artemus, who was the Greek equivalent to the Roman goddess Venus. She was the goddess of fertility and love. And the Temple itself was magnificent and one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It housed ten thousand temple prostitutes who did their business with many of the sea farers who came to port, along with other businessmen who frequented this area. To be called a “Corinthian” when you were not from Corinth was an insult. It meant that you were of very low morals to say the least. This was much like our cities and culture today that have idolized lust and sex, and have gone sex crazy. In the writing to this church we see how great the struggle was even in the church among those who were members of the church at Corinth.

And Paul when he came to this church must of been somewhat discouraged. The ministry itself can be discouraging. We need certainly a mindset we do all for the glory of Christ. But think about all that Paul has gone through. Certainly there was opposition on his first missionary journey. He was even stoned at one point. But hardship and opposition seemed to increase the more he went. And certainly it was rough going as far as seeing people come to Christ. At Philippi he and Silas were severely beaten and flogged, and there for the first time Paul was imprisoned for the gospel. He left the missionary band behind as he went to Athens because there was a small church founded there, and they need instruction and to be taught. And Athens there really seems to be very little fruit. Certainly there was no church started there, but just rejection and ridicule met him there. And now he makes his way to Corinth, which is about three days journey by foot, and you can imagine how dejected he was.

Not only that but it does seem that his funds have run out. He will now have to work in order to be able to meet his needs and preach the gospel of Christ. Later, funds would come from believers in this region. Listen to what he says in 2 Corinthians 11:9, **“And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.”** And you can imagine him now working while labouring for the cause of Christ.

And maybe I am reading too much into this. But, Paul is alone in another major city, and here he is trying to serve Christ. And discouragement many times runs rampant through the people of God. Look at all the effort, look at all the fatigue, and opposition. And after another Lord's day, this next week is going to be a repeat of all the trials and opposition and fatigue again. Can you feel Paul? Have you ever been there? It is not that we want to give up on Christianity but is there an easier way, is there an easier path or location? Think of walking into this city and the debauchery all around. You are met by rank idolatry in Athens. It is everywhere. But the idolatry of this city is so different. Here, no one cares about gross sin against a holy God.

And here at Corinth Paul meets a couple of individuals, and I believe it makes all the difference. There are some people who love to be alone, but most of us we do not do well alone in the battles of life. We are social beings. God is a community of three in one being. One of the most encouraging things in any ministry and in life in general God gives us is our fellow believers — those who truly encourage, strengthen and even rebuke us in the things of the Lord. And Paul meets a couple just at the right time and the right place. Some believers just have a knack of keeping our eyes on Christ, and giving words of encouragement, words of direction to us at the right time. And so as we look at this passage, I want us to see we all need the community of believers to truly keep our eyes on Christ. We were not meant to live this life alone, and secondly, we need to seek to be the encouragement of others. We need to be that balm in the desert. When others are around, it might be your spouse or children or whoever, are they more encouraged to follow Christ by your testimony? I want us to see a couple things this morning, as Paul begins his labours in Corinth.

1. We need to have the encouragement of others. V. 2-3

Life is hard. We often find ourselves in places and situation, trial and temptations we never thought we would ever be in. And you can imagine Paul being in this large city, and walking through it, and feeling all alone. Have you ever been in that situation where you can be in a large crowd and it might even be at a church activity but feel all alone? Amazing what sorrow and pain can do. But suddenly someone enters our lives and speaks. They talk about Christ and his goodness, the glory of who he is, or they speak about the struggle they are going through, and we walk away so edified and uplifted. Just in a short span of time that burden seemed to be lifted. And we can all probably think of specific people in our lives who have had that very influence for our good. But be honest, do you have that influence on others? When meeting someone or anyone, before you meet them, do you think they are carry some kind of burdens, I might not know what it is but how can I encourage them in Christ? We are all called to have this kind of ministry in the lives of one another. After speaking of our great salvation Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, "**Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.**" There is an intentionality to this labour of encouragement. Encouragement is a ministry, and a vital ministry.

So look at verse 2 and think of all that this couple have gone through and how much Paul was encouraged through their ministry and how they were encouraged. These were not only fellow believers but fellow sufferers who also needed that gospel applied and spoken into their lives. They needed the ministry of edification. Verse 2 says, "**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.

I love the way this verse begins is “he found a Jew,” more importantly God arranged that this Jewish believer would be at the right place at the right time to meet the apostle Paul. God is the one who is constantly caring for his lambs and he will not lose any of them. He meets Aquila and his wife Priscilla who is often referred to as Prisca. They were from Pontus which happens to be in the region of Asia, and they were living in Rome. They seem to be believers already. They are not mentioned as converts of Paul’s from Corinth. And it is incredible to see the advance of Christianity at this point. This mission band of Paul and his contemporaries are not the only ones planting churches but there is a thriving church at Corinth. Paul never having been to the church at Rome church, writes to that church as one that he often wanted to visit but never has. He would come in chains one day.

But Aquila and Priscilla were forced out of the city of Rome because of an edict of Claudius forcing all Jews out of the city. Now this is actually recorded in other histories. And there seems to be a disturbance created by the Jewish population because of the preaching of Christ. Christianity still was not recognized as separate from Judaism and the Jews were forced to leave, on account that Jesus is the only way. So here are believers being persecuted in Rome, and Aquila and Priscilla by the grace and providence of God end up in Corinth, through all of this history and events at the exact time that Paul through all of his events end up in Corinth. Here is a couple and a man who have been through the wringer. Paul would still have all of the marks and wounds of that flogging in Philippi, and here by the providence of God they are in this wicked city as an encouragement to one another and a means of endurance by our great God. Isn’t our God so good and amazing?

And not only that, but they are of the same occupation! Look at verse 3, **“and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.”** There were other churches that supported Paul, you can glean and see that in many of his letters how he thanks them for their support. But Paul was in need, and now he would function bi-vocationally. He would labour during the day in tent-making, which was quite a craft, and seek to preach and testify in the evenings. And many missionaries and pastors today are bi-vocational for the glory of Christ. It is not always a bad thing. Sometimes it is a means of getting into a closed county. Praise God for the work of so many who labour during the day in these places to be able to minister in the evenings and weekends. It is difficult and certainly a labour of love.

I do think it is extraordinary that the many who work for Christ, truly serving him and ministering the gospel of Christ, many times suffer from lack of funds or just seem to survive year after year, while others who offer a false gospel rake in millions. The most prosperous ministries today are the health, wealth and prosperity gospel ministries. Yet those who seek to make known Christ many times have a hard time. God’s servants many times struggle. Certainly, it is good for us to remember that God provides, and it does keep our eyes on him. But it is amazing even as the people of God, how often we are willing to spend and invest in our own things rather than the kingdom of Christ, rather than investing in the day to day, week to week activities of making and maturing of disciples of Christ for his eternal glory. The stats are out there that the vast majority of believers never give or give so infrequently, and really never

plan to give. And as we look at where we put our money it many times is a reflection of what we deem or see as important. I wonder if any would look at our bank statements would they see anything of our faith and trust in Christ?

Now Paul meets Aquila at this trade guild, and I cannot imagine how refreshing this must have been. Here is a man of substance, seen in that he was willing to suffer for Christ. Paul might have even worked for him, and notice the “he” stayed with them. Paul not only stayed at his residence, but the other missionaries would join Paul. This was probably the place where they made tents and worked, and it was a safe place. Now what are the chances of Paul who was recently at Philippi and then Athens, and Aquila and Priscilla who were making a life and serving God in Rome would ever meet, let alone live together in the wicked city of Corinth? Only God can arrange these things.

And you can only imagine the conversations deep into the night. They no doubt shared much of what they had been through, and how God had provided. Aquila sharing how the gospel advanced right in the capital, how it created a stir and no doubt angered the Jews and some of the idolaters of Rome, how there was still a thriving church and many pagans coming to Christ. The hardship of leaving family and a beloved church. And Paul with all he had been through most recently in Philippi and Athens. And you can imagine them talking about the blessed gospel — the righteous one came to die for the unrighteous. I am the chiefest of sinners but look at his grace in my life. And you can imagine any discouragement seemed to quickly dissipate, and now they are in the same city and in the same circumstances. Amazing isn't it, how the gospel changes everything? Also, hearing others struggles and God's faithfulness, and hearing the truth of Christ from others is so uplifting. God uses the ministry of others to cause us to endure and to be encouraged.

And let me ask you this morning — are you discouraged? Are you going through trials and suffering, and you never thought it would be this tough and this heavy? Because one of the things we do when we feel the burdens and discouragement of life, family, faith, health or whatever, we tend to isolate. we tend to judge others who we think cannot relate. We tend in discouragement to add discouragement by isolation. And it would be easy to say — well no one is reaching out. Or no one is caring. No one understands. But here is the challenge. There are other sufferers right here. Just look around. God wants you to be involved in the ministry of encouragement.

I wish I did this more perfectly, but I often ask the Lord whatever situation I am in to help me try and encourage those who are around me, not to think about myself and my problems, put the spotlight on others. When I go to men's breakfast, I think about that I am going to be seating with men who have lived in this world and brokenness, how can I be a blessing in my conversation? What are some things that I can speak about to direct our attention and hope back on Christ? If I have an appointment with another or having coffee with someone, I pray the same thing. And here is the amazing thing about God's grace — I might even be discouraged and feel overburdened when I go to be with that person or people. But as we talk about Christ and even their difficulties and struggles and how God's word speaks to it, they are not the only ones that go away encouraged but my heart is so encouraged in the things of Christ. He becomes so much bigger. Encouragement doesn't just happen, or God would not have commanded it, but it is intentional. It is really a ministry of God among the people of God. You know how much you need encouragement, no doubt Paul and Aquila and

Priscilla needed encouragement, but are you seeking to fulfill that ministry in the lives of others? We can complain so much, but are we intentional in encouragement?

2. We need to see the outcome of encouragement. V. 4.

What is one of the by-products of encouragement in the faith of Christ? We could easily say that it is joy in Christ. Our whole disposition is changed. The gospel gives us so much hope in the midst of all our trials and difficulties. It reorients our minds and hearts toward Christ. We suddenly see the hand of God everywhere even though God has been present all along. But there is one other fruit that needs to be mentioned and that is gratitude. We are so thankful for all that our God has done and is doing in our lives. And that really is the impetus of serving him. The motivation is not to get, but to give because we have already received. We have bountiful salvation forevermore. Jesus really has done it all. And the more we realize and let those truths occupy our hearts and minds the more we want to give and serve.

So think of the ministry of encouragement particularly in the life of Paul, because right after we read his meeting with and staying with Aquila and Priscilla we read in verse 4, **“And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.”** This right here is a summary statement of the ministry of Paul in the city of Corinth. There is determination and there is urgency to his ministry among the population. He first of all does what he traditionally did in other places and that is enter the synagogue, and reasoned every Sabbath or Saturday. He teaches, and no doubt using the Old Testament shows how Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He is the Great Priest King who has come to give his life for a ransom for many. And as we will see, his ministry in the synagogue was greatly used by God so much so that the leader of the synagogue will try and take legal action against Paul to force him to stop.

Then you have the second clause in this verse, **“and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.”** And I don't think this is mainly talking about his ministry in the synagogue but his labour outside of the synagogue. Every Sabbath busy in the synagogue, his nights and days off making Christ known in personal conversations with others. He is speaking to anyone and everyone of the great hope of Jesus Christ. No doubt he talked about sin which every person could see in their lives. He talked about self effort and how none of us could live up to the law written on our hearts, about the punishment to come, but also about the glory of God coming in human flesh to take that punishment we all deserve. And in this one verse you see a summary of activity, and so much effort and zeal behind making much of Christ to those who do not know him, and those who could cause so much difficulty and harm.

Now think about how Paul came to this city and all that he had been through. Think again of all the discouragement and the fatigue. We have all been there. Listen to how he came in 1 Corinthians 2:3, **“And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.”** Is this just going to be a repeat of Philippi or Athens? Should I just go back to Antioch? What changed? What makes Paul this bold preacher of the gospel of Christ again? He is not a super Christian. He is made of flesh and weakness just like all of us. All of us get discouraged. Listen to what he says about his ministry in Asia in 2 Corinthians 1:8, **“For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction**

we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.” Imagine being so discouraged that you despaired of even being alive. I wish God would just take my life and be done with it!

Here is my whole point, God uses the presence and ministry of others in our lives. God providentially brought this couple along, who would be so instrumental to Paul carrying on, enduring, and being zealous in the things of the Lord. Let me ask you — do you realize the need of others in your life; the ministry of others? I think we think we can do it on our own. I think what leads to one of the great discouragements in our lives is our own delusions of strength. I can be the husband or father, the wife or mother, the friend or labourer that God wants me to be. I can handle the difficulties and pressures all on my own. I don't need help. I have Jesus. Jesus helps us by sending his sheep into our lives. That is why church and church activity is so important. It is so easy to isolate, and then from a distance judge others. Realize your need. Don't forsake the assembling of the people of God. And be active in body life.

And lastly, be intentional. You know because you live in this world that is tough and you live with a heart that is prone to wander. Be intentional in cultivating a heart that encouraging, and please understand encouragement is more than you can do it, but pointing others to the one who has done it all, pointing away from ourselves to our great hope in Christ. Listen to how that truth of our great hope functions toward the discouraged Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, **“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”** Be intentional for the glory of our God!