

The Ups and Down of Ministry Acts 18:5-6

It is incredible as you look at life and you look at ministry how it can bring you to such great highs and then such great lows. It is part of life in a fallen world. And as Paul comes to Corinth, he is now doubt waiting for the arrival of Timothy and Silas, but he finds employment and provides for himself. Paul, as we will see today received support from others, but he never received support from those where he was preaching the gospel and seeking to do pioneer ministry. He didn't want to be confused with many of the philosophers of the day who took pay for teaching. Christianity could be confused as just another philosophy. But Paul wanted his hearer to understand the free gift of God through Jesus Christ. Jesus has really done it all.

So he meets this couple in the tent making guild who were forced out of Rome because of Roman persecution, and here they work and stay together, and Paul in the evenings and on the Sabbath would make known Christ. And no doubt the presence of Aquila and Priscilla were such an encouragement to the apostle Paul for him to keep on keeping on in the calling God had given him. He really seemed to have a tough time in Athens even though there was not any physical persecution, there was the apathy and even the ridicule of how simplistic the message of Christianity.

And here is the thing, our lives are such a mixture of ups and downs. The thing that gets our attention most often are the downs — the difficulties and the struggles. And we can get so frustrated when things start to go wrong in our lives. Think of the struggles and difficulties in your life right now. We can be convinced that they are there because people are sinners or it is just a fallen world problem, and that is it. I have met struggling Christians who look at the trials in their lives and can't imagine that God has ordained them, providentially put them into their lives. God is too good. These things are too tough. It could be the death of a loved one. It could be a disease that is ravishing your body creating untold pain. It could be a marriage that has always brought pain, or children who want nothing to do with Christ. It could be financial pressure, which puts pressure on the rest of your life. There is no way God would have orchestrated these in my life. God is loving and good and gracious and generous. We believe in God's sovereignty but only to an extent.

But what if we looked into the Scriptures and saw God is too good not to have these trials in our lives? What if we said that these trials are not an indicator that we have been forgotten of God or that it is a sign of his displeasure against us, but it is a sign of his love and his grace? Our problem is none of us want the grace that God gives. We want the grace of our own choosing. We want the ups of life with no downs. In all your struggles you are being graced by our God. Listen to 1 Peter 1:6-7, **"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."** I love what this verse teaches but it is wrapping your head around it so that you obey it and see the comfort in it. We have the command to rejoice, and the reason for it is "grieved by various trials." They don't seem to belong together. But the whole goal is the testing and refining of our faith

so that our Lord might be magnified and glorified. We often pray for God to be glory in our lives and don't realize how dangerous a prayer that is!

And I love the two words there, "if necessary." Think of it. Here is God's goodness. God will never send us through something that he has not ordained us to go through without the highest reason in our lives. "If necessary" indicates that if it isn't necessary then your suffering would not be there. So we can rejoice not in the pain itself but my God is gracing me with the necessary grace to transform me into the image of his blessed Saviour. And this will magnify him for all of eternity.

There are so many ups that happen to be in life. So often we miss what God is doing because we are so overwhelmed with the struggles. But here is the thing, I want us to see that God is sovereign in all our suffering, and truly count all our blessings in Christ Jesus which includes all our ups and downs of life. There is no randomness in life. You are here this morning to hear about the struggles of Paul and also the blessings in his life. All the difficulties of life are not a detour in the goal of making much of Christ — which the ups can do as much as the downs of life. How are you looking at life in this fallen world? Are you seeing the hand of God in all of this? May God help us see our lives through the lens of His Scripture. God is truly up to good in our lives. I want us to see the ups and down of ministry in a fallen world.

1. We need to see the ups or the blessings of life. V. 5

There is so much going on in this verse that I hope we can see something of the enormity, and truly seek to glory in our God in the many things that are in our lives right now — many of the things that allowed us even to be here this morning. God makes no mistake by allowing us to come out Sunday after Sunday. We know how much we need those times. There are times we come into a service absolutely worn out and parched and discouraged, but after the songs, preaching, and time with God's people it is amazing how we are spiritually sustained, strengthen, encouraged to face the week ahead, and have our eyes once again riveted on Christ.

And this is what must have happen with the arrival of Silas and Timothy. Look at our verse right here, "**When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia.**" Notice the arrival of Silas and Timothy. Remember, they were not with Paul. Paul left Timothy in Philippi, Silas was sent somewhere else, and Paul waited for them at Athens. He must have sent word for Timothy to go to Thessalonica, because he was just too concerned about them. The church was planted quite quickly but because of persecution Paul was forced out of the city and he longed to know how they were doing. Did they persevere? How were they doing? So Timothy arrives back with word that the church is not only persevering but thriving. Listen to what he says in 1 Thessalonians 2:17, "**But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face.**" Paul was prevented from going back, but you can hear the emotion and the anxiety and deep concern — the kind that keeps you up at night. So now listen to 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, "**Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith.**" Now Timothy returns, and it is right here in Corinth that Paul pens this letter. It is such an

uplifting and encouraging letter to these believers where their witness is spreading out to all the world. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 3:6-7, **“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.”**

And this really is part and parcel of pastoral work is the care and concern for the people of God. And even the inability to be with every one all the time. Paul cannot be in Thessalonica for the simple reason he is in Corinth. And yet there is that weight that presses down. We all know something of that weight because if we love others we feel that weight when others are struggling or have various difficulties and struggles in their lives. And those limitations are good because they remind us we are not God. We cannot be omnipresent and we cannot be people’s Messiah. There is one that is present, and there is one the Thessalonians need more than Paul and it is Christ.

But you can imagine the joy, relief, excitement that Paul felt when Timothy arrived back with word on the church at Thessalonica. The church was not just an entity in that city but these were faces, people whom Paul cared deeply about. And think of the believers here this morning. We all have difficulties and trials, and we have all tried to carry and encourage one another. Often the people who fall away get top billing, but do we ever notice the work of God in the hearts of those who continue? Are we even overwhelmed that God has not only caused us to persevere but to grow in Christ? There is so much in the midst of all our trials to praise God in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

But there is something else that makes Paul’s ministry even more effective no was such a blessing in Corinth. Look at our verse again, **“When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.”** Now this is in contrast with verse 4 and how Paul was ministering, **“And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.”** Notice here it so “every Sabbath,” but in verse 5 it is Paul was “occupied with the word,” in other words taken fully up with preaching and testifying the truths of Christ. Well, I thought he had to work and support himself? Well when Silas and Timothy arrived they brought much needed financial relief and support from the other Macedonian churches. 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.”** Also Philippians 4:15, **“And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.”** Notice what he calls this giving “partnership.” They are partners in all that Paul does. Paul cannot be occupied or consumed with the ministry of the Word while tent making.

And there are a couple things here. One is that this a pastor’s passion — ministering the word. We realize the main calling is to preach the word — to be a workers that needs not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. Notice the text says, **“Paul was occupied with the word.”** And for one who is truly called by God, you cannot imagine doing anything else with your life. You cannot be content with tent

making or anything else. It is so much more than a calling. It is a passion to know the Word and give the word, and for the Pastor it is such a joy and glory in his life. The word “occupied” here is to be given totally over to. It is a dangerous age that we are living in. In order to be a pastor the prerequisite was a love of reading and a love of study so that you could accurately and passionately make known the truth of Christ. With the development of A.I. You can plug in a passage and say gives me a sermon like John MacArthur or Piper and then there is an original message, but it is not his message. It is not his work. You see part of the passion and devotion is you really study to the glory of God, and that truth changes you before it ever changes others.

I put in to A.I., how Kevin Scott of Emmanuel Baptist Church would explain or summarize Philippians 1:21, “**For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain**” listen to part what it gave me, “**To Die is Gain**” — **The Ultimate Win-Win**

- **No Fear of Death: He would confront the universal fear of death by showing that for the believer, death is a promotion, not a punishment. Because Jesus' work on the cross is a finished, sufficient sacrifice, the sting of death is completely removed.**
- **The Intermediate State: He would likely touch on the doctrine of the intermediate state—clarifying that to depart means to immediately "be with Christ, which is far better".**
- **Secured by the Sovereign Creator: He would tie this assurance back to the character of a [Sovereign God](#). Because our eternal state is legally secure through justification, a believer faces life's trials with absolute confidence.**

4. The Pastoral Application

- **The Ultimate Question: Pastor Scott would conclude with a direct, probing question to the congregation's hearts: "If you fill in the blank 'For to me, to live is _____,' what is the honest answer for your life right now?"**
- **Call to Discipleship: He would exhort the church to stop playing the part of religious hypocrites, to live transparently, and to actively advance the Gospel. He would remind them that when your life belongs entirely to Jesus, you are in a win-win situation—whether you live or die, Christ is magnified.**

That is probably better than I could have stated it, but all that work is done by a computer, but the problem is I didn't do that work. A computer cannot worship God, and study of God's work is personal. It is worship. But I didn't worship God. I didn't study to show myself approved. A.I. cannot worship God. There are no shortcuts here. Men of God need to study the Scriptures. The people of God need to study the Scriptures.

But let me end with one other thing, and that is whatever a faithful pastor does in the pulpit he never does it alone. When you support your pastor and allow him to not worry about his physical needs or provide through some sort of secular work, you are partnering with him in every sermon, in every discipleship opportunity, and every change that comes over anyone's heart and life through that ministry of the word. Think

of it, God's word does not come back void, and you have had a partnership with this particular individual for the last 25+ years. It is one of the things that keeps me going in the study. God not only has entrusted me but you have as well, and you have freely invested in the lives of others through the ministry of the Word. If that does not encourage your heart, I do not know what will.

2. We see the down of ministry. V.5-6

Again, life is filled with ups and downs. And the trials and difficulties can be so arduous. They can seem so overwhelming at times. And many times the greatest pain comes with those we have a relationship with, we are close with. Add to that, you want the Lord's will done in their lives, it can even be that much more crushing. But even beyond that some of the most crushing pain that comes in ministry comes against the person ministering the truth. And the pain is that it really is not against the person but our great God. And when I first started out pastoring I knew and prepared my heart there would be opposition, I just didn't realize how vocal and how difficult it would be at times. Not only on my soul but also on my wife who carries the burden of her husband out of love for Christ and love for him.

But the opposition, although difficult in my own life is nothing compared to what Paul went through. So Paul is ministering to those in the synagogue and reasoning how Jesus is the Christ. This does not mean that his ministry is exclusively among the Jews, but this is where the bulk of his time was spent. And it is not that there was no fruit here as we will see next week. But there were very influential individuals and public voices that opposed him. Listen to verse 6 again, **"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.'"** The word opposed means "face to face." It is not behind the back but vocal and it is in opposition. And you can imagine how this made ministering in the synagogue almost impossible. Also, reviling him is throwing insults at him. Motives are judged, statements are changed and the whole goal is revile the person in the eyes of others. Many make this their whole goal.

These individuals would have been influential and powerful as we see they had the ear of the proconsul below. And the main argument against Paul is stated in verse Acts 18:13, **"saying, 'This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.'"** And Jesus died by crucifixion, and the law states that cursed is anyone that hanged on a tree. Jesus is accursed of God, and Paul is persuading others to worship this one who is accursed! But that is the whole point, he was cursed so that we would never be. He took the penalty that we deserve.

Now Paul shakes the dust off his garments which was a sign of judgment against the unbelieving Jews. And in their vocal opposition many times a stern warning is definitely needed. Paul will turn to preaching and teaching to the Gentiles the glories of salvation in Christ. Now, it does not mean that he will never minister to the Jews or will ever enter another synagogue, but his main efforts in Corinth will be to the Gentile population. And this has to be tough. If you have ever poured your life into individuals and ministered faithfully, and remember Paul devoted himself to making Christ known. He threw himself into the ministry God had given him. And it is tough to see people turn away. It is tough to be called names or have your words turned upside down. And it is tough when people do this who claim some fidelity with the true God of heaven. Some

of the deepest wounds that you face in ministry are from individuals that by God's grace you have poured into for the cause of Christ, but now what they say about Christ and even his church is so painful.

Have you ever been there? Are you there now? It might be in the church with individuals you had such intimate fellowship with, and they just seem to have acid on their lips about you and the Lord Jesus Christ. It might be with an adult child. They in one sense love you and get along with you, but the moment Jesus is mentioned they either get angry or begin the ridicule the One you so love. And it is so painful. In one sense we want to say what is the use? If this is what I receive from wanting the best for individuals I will just keep the gospel to myself.

But what Paul does here in this passage is so helpful to us in the midst of those down times in ministry and life, and there can be many of them. And that is to realize there is always more people to minister to. There are always so many more opportunities to make much of Christ. There are always those who truly love Christ or want to hear that message. It is so easy to get lost in our hurt. And people can hurt us substantially. But look at the opportunities! Paul doesn't quit on this area or this church but he will end up staying here a year and a half — in this wicked city of Christ rejectors, and what will be formed is a body of believers that will glorify the name which is above every name. Maybe you are so discouraged this morning. Look around you. There are so many opportunities to still make much of Christ. I think so often we try to minister to people who do not want anything to do with Christ, and we miss the very ones that might be hurting or struggling that really need our help, and Christ is calling us into our lives.

I often think in the midst of opposition and rejection, that there are people to minister to on Sunday. The word of God will be preached, and God is still doing more than we can ask or think. Yes, there are so many ups and downs in life. Yes, your life is hard. Often we think it is so much more difficult than others, and it might be, but we forget that everyone lives in this broken world of ups and downs. But here is the thing, God is the one redirecting Paul, and as he looks to our great King, God will do things of eternal significance through him. There is in one way, no ups and downs, but if we understand our trials rightly God is up to us in our lives. He is up to good. He can be trusted in not only changing us but changing others for his eternal glory. See your life through his lens. Our God is good and always good.