

Acts 18:9-28

“Saved And Strengthened”

We catch up to Paul in Corinth towards the close of his 2nd missionary journey (geographically speaking). Time wise there would be a couple more years but that would be spent *mainly* right here in Corinth where the light of the gospel *has been* and is *continuing to* come on strong.

The light of Jesus Christ is shining brightly in this what had become known more or less as the pit of moral declension and God is saving to the uttermost, even (as we said) to the guttermost those who are coming to Him through Christ. and There would be an incredible harvest that God would reap here in Corinth, it's like we spoke last week that where sin abounds grace abounds still more. That God didn't come to save the righteous, but to call the sinner to repentance, and though all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, it seems that Corinth bred a special kind of sinner (if you can call it that), they represented pretty much the lowest ebb on the moral scale of humanity. They were stereotypically renowned for their immoral, illicit lifestyles. But again what happened in Corinth, the radical harvest that took place and all, just seems to serve to remind us that God is in the business of forgiving sinners and regenerating, degenerate lives. When Paul was writing to the Corinthians he said, “*Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*” 1 Cor 6:9-11 You read through that and you think, “My that's a lovely list of certain sinful scenarios isn't it?” But the idea there isn't to draw our attention to the circumstance of sin that he's describing, but rather the redeeming power of Jesus Christ (That you were at one time “*This*”, but now you're “*This*,” and that *transformation*, the subsequent *sanctification* and *justification* by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.)

But consider that list, fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers and extortioners; there's just not a whole lot there that appeals to the honor society is there? But God looks down and says, “Hey, a sinner...perfect candidate for salvation.” and It's not that someone else isn't a sinner, we've all sinned, but some people don't really recognize a sin nature in themselves, they think they're doing pretty good. and Generally speaking those people are those who are in the upper echelons of society. Not always or emphatically, there are some people who in the upper half of the social strata that love God with all that they are. But by comparison they're rare gems, that's why for the most part God calls people like you and me who are low lives and we know it. You see people in a list like that, know they've got problems, and the more cognizant of your sin that you are, the more open to reasoning about a Savior you'll be.

That's why Paul told them, "*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -- that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.'*" 1 Cor 1:26-28 and That's the picture that's being painted for us here in Acts 18, worldly *rejects* becoming the *elect* of God. But I get the idea that somewhere between vs 6-7 things started getting shaky for Paul, and then between vs 8-9 the situation must've become down right volatile.

As he really began hammering home the point to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, opposition began to surface. (You recall great opportunities often come with great opposition). Paul turned from the Jewish community to the Gentile community starting a home bible study in Justus' house right next door to the synagogue. Now that began to ruffle some feathers, but then when Crispus (the ruler of the synagogue) gave *his* heart to Christ, along with his whole family. We sorta get the idea that that's when adversity really began to surge, because it's after that that we read in vs 9.

Vs9-10

You see Paul had come to realize that (at least in his life) *great ministerial gain* was too often at the expense of *great personal pain*. Stoned in Lystra, beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, barely escaped in Thessalonica (his host home even being threatened) run out of Berea by the Jews from Thessalonica. Even at his conversion when he began to preach Jesus he had to be sent out of Damascus by stealth because they were potting to kill him there, and there will plenty more persecution to come. and So as revival is breaking loose in Corinth and incredible hostile tension is in the air, Paul begins to get worried, perhaps considering whether or not it's time to go. You see the implication behind, "Don't be afraid," is that Paul *was afraid*, if he wasn't afraid there would be no need to tell him not to be. and That word for "afraid" there is "Fobou" or we might say, "Phobed out" this word speaks of being intensely exceedingly fearful, Paul is just really incredibly nervous here to say the least, wondering how all this is going to turn out.

But the Lord comes to him. Now last week we mentioned that adversity is sure to visit your life along with the opportunities that God will give you to speak of Him and share who He is with those around you. and I encouraged you not to be ashamed of the gospel, but understand that being ashamed, and being afraid are 2 different things. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel; he wasn't ashamed of Jesus Christ he allowed his life to be spent in the propulsion of the message of the cross of Jesus Christ But he would become fearful from time and again as to how that message would be or was being received.

No one enjoys a good beating, and physical fear is natural in the face of hostility, so recognize that being ashamed and being afraid are 2 different things. Now being ashamed is a topic for another time, but what I want you to see here is that being *afraid* can be overcome. It's only natural to be fearful in the face of what may seem to be certain danger, but God *supernaturally* comforts Paul and dispels his fear by the means of a 2-fold promise. Did you see it there in vs 10? If you take notes jot them down. The Lord dispels Paul's dread and boosts his boldness by the promise of 2 things, #1 His Presence, and #2 His Protection. What's the primary assurance I need in my life to "Be not afraid"? The conscious awareness of the presence of God, the fact that God is with me, if you are cognizant of the fact that God is with you, than what is there to fear? As the Psalmist said, "*The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*" Ps 118:6 He was brought into the reality and the awareness of the fact that God was with him, it dispelled his fear. and Over and over throughout the scriptures the Lord comforts his people, calms their fears by reminding them of the fact that He is with them. He told Ab in a vision, "*Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.*" Gen 15:1 "I am with you Ab," He told Isaac, "*I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you.*" Gen 26:24 Isa 41:10 "*Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*" and Believe me those are just a select few, the most often repeated command in the word of God is to fear not, or do not be afraid, don't worry, things of that nature. and The primary way that God helps us overcome our fears is the promise of His presence with us. "*Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*" Josh 1:9 He will never leave you, never forsake you, do not be afraid.

Now you have a choice, I have a choice, to believe that promise, or not. How do I know when I'm struggling believing it? I fear, the fruit of unbelief is disobedience, and conversely the fruit of belief, is obedience. That's why with out faith it's impossible to please Him, because faith produces trust, obedience. But the lack of faith bears the fruit of doubt, and disobedience.

Now in this case God not only promised Paul His presence, but also His protection, "No one will attack you to hurt you." The question comes up, why did God protect Paul here, but not in so many other places from physical harm? I don't know, why did He allow James to be run through with the sword, and then divinely deliver Peter from prison? This much I do know, that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus *will suffer* persecution.

There will be times when God will hedge you about, not give to you more than you can bear, that's the promise of His word. But if in His sovereignty He allows us at times to enter into the fellowship of the Lord's sufferings, then seek Him in that time for what He would have you to learn through that time. There are all kinds of things God teaches us through suffering (of which we don't have the time to explore them today, we have in the past).

But for now God promises to protect Paul, “So speak out, don’t keep silent, My presence is with you, My protection will hedge you, I have many people in this city.” God was to call many people to Himself here, “So Paul don’t keep silent, propel, and proclaim the gospel, that many might be saved.” and That’s the word of the Lord to us, He has ordained that those who will come to know Him should do so by the hearing *of*, and the believing *in* the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ and Him delivered up for our transgression, raised up for our justification. But how can they believe what they’ve never heard, and how can they hear unless one proclaim? So speak and do not keep silent, God wants people to come to know Him, and He wants to use you in the accomplishing of that agenda, He is with you, sometimes He’ll keep you *from* the storms, other times He’ll be with you *in* the storms, but He’ll never leave you, no need to fear.

Vs11

So Paul acted on the promises of God, his fear faded, his dread disappeared, and he continued in Corinth for a yr and ½. One of the longest stops in his missionary journey, and what was he doing that whole time? Notice, “Teaching the word of God among them,” meaning that he was *imparting instruction*, and *instilling*, or *implanting* doctrine *into* them. He was *explaining* and *expounding* upon God’s word *for* them. and He stayed there a long time doing that, which means that he wasn’t an “in and out” kind of evangelist, it wasn’t “Got ya saved, now so long.” Paul’s duration tells us that he wasn’t only interested in seeing people saved, but seeing them strengthened as well, making disciples. He didn’t just preach and outreach the whole time, but rather he took those new believers and taught them the principles and precepts of God’s word in an orderly fashion, something desperately missing in the church today, just solid bible teaching. It seems there’s more preachers than you can shake a stick at, and that’s a great thing, but there’s a difference between preaching and teaching. and What so many believers are lacking today is that solid instruction, and implanting of the word of God line upon line, precept upon precept into their lives. and Then beyond that, not only being given the *information* but then being taught the practical *application* as to where does this hit me today? Paul took a year and a half to help establish, and root them in the word of God, equipping the saints for the work of the ministry.

Vs12-17

God didn’t tell Paul that they wouldn’t *pursue* him, or seek to *persecute* him, but that they wouldn’t be successful because He would *protect* Him.

Here Luke gives us a case where He did just that. The Jews drug him down to the judgment seat and there sought to make a case against him before Gallio, saying that he was teaching men to worship God contrary to the law. They were trying to make a political case out of the deal, and really this is quite pivotal because if they were successful at getting Gallio to side with them on the issue, than is essence biblical Christianity would’ve been against the law in that entire providence and it would’ve been a huge hang up for Paul’s ministry.

But in the poetic justice of God, if there was any ambiguity in the eyes of the Roman administration in that area before as to what Paul was up to, it's been completely eliminated now and he's free to preach to whomever, however he wants. These guys trying to shut him out, just opened the door completely for him. Just like the bible says, "*Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him.*" Prov 26:27

Sosthenes was hoping to have Paul beaten and silenced, but instead *he* was silenced, was told that the state didn't want to mingle in religious matters (church and state type thing) and in the process *he* was beaten, and silenced on the matter. So God is able to deliver you, and notice Paul didn't even need to defend himself, God did it for him just like He said He would. and This is just another account given to us by the Holy Spirit to encourage us to trust in the Lord with all our heart, God is true to His word and He'll take care of your life. and Even when it seems like things are going south, God can work great things in the midst of it. It's interesting when you read 1st Cor, whose name is mentioned in the very 1st vs, "Sosthenes our brother." It would seem that the ruler of the synagogue who replaced Crispus got saved out of this whole deal himself. Perhaps after he was beaten, Paul and the other disciples ministered to him, tended to his needs, and prayed for him and all, and through that God began to change his heart towards these guys. Jesus said, "*I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven;*" Matt 5:44-45 It's God's goodness that leads us to repentance.

Vs18

No doubt the vow of the Nazirite (Cenchrea was the seaport at Corinth), now at this point some people are confused. Why is Paul, the champion of grace, placing himself under the legal bondage of a vow? But this doesn't have to be a complicated thing, that's the wonderful thing about the grace of God, if you want to make a vow to God you're free to do that, (just make sure you fulfill it), if you don't want to make a vow, you're none the lesser if you don't. Paul was very clear about the fact that it's not about what we *do* that makes us righteous, but rather what Jesus has *done*, he knew this didn't make him any more spiritual. Than why do it? Why do we fast? Does it make us more spiritual, more righteous, a little more holy in the eyes of God? No. But it's a way that commend ourselves to Him, a practical denying of the flesh that we might seek after the things of the Spirit. The Nazirite vow was a vow of consecration, perhaps being in the carnal throws of Corinth, he felt a need to express his consecration to God in an even more personally impacting way so as to remind him why he was there and to Whom he belonged, I'm not sure. But this was an outward demonstration of his inward consecration to God, and when the vow was complete, they'd shave their head, and offer the hair on the altar at the Temple in Jerusalem. So now that they're leaving Corinth, he shaves his head, the days of his vow are complete, and he takes off (ultimately) for Jerusalem.

Vs19-21

Paul had wanted to minister in Ephesus a couple of yrs ago but the Holy Spirit had prevented him from going there. But now the door is open, and it'll be great and effective.

But Paul doesn't plant himself to firmly yet, he wants to complete his vow there in Jerusalem, but the point is that in reality the Holy Spirit wasn't telling him "no" a couple years ago, but more specifically "wait." and We spoke about this briefly Wednesday evening in that God's will, done God's way, involves God's timing as well. and He does have a divine design and time line for our lives by which He desires to operate, and sometimes it's not so much us whom He's preparing as it is the person or place that He's sending you.

People need to be in a place where they're ready to receive the message you're bringing if you're to be effective, and so some times God is preparing them to receive as much as He's preparing you to proclaim the message. and Man its easy to get impatient and try to force an issue, but better to just wait on the Lord to open the door, Paul didn't go to Ephesus when the Lord was closing that door, he waited. Now, he's about to have one of the most effective outreach ministries of his entire missionary experience.

Now notice quickly this little phrase in vs 21, "God willing." This is wisdom on Paul's behalf, he's not presuming upon the Lord that he's *going to do* anything. But that if God wills, he'll return, remember what James said? "*Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit;' whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'*" James 4:13-15 and He goes on to say that when we just presume what we're going to do in reality it's arrogance on our behalf. We need to be sensitive to the fact that God is the One who's in control and we'll do what we do should it fit with in the parameters of His will. and So Paul says, "God willing, I'll be back."

Vs22-23

So he went up to Jerusalem, greeted the church, then went down to Antioch and his 2nd missionary journey was officially over. But being restless, always concerned for the churches he'd planted, he left again for a 3rd time going over the regions of Galatia and Phrygia (notice) *strengthening* the disciples. So again his original agenda for going out wasn't evangelical here but rather to encourage and strengthen, sure up, affirming and confirming the disciples, Paul had a heart to make strong healthy Christians, to feed the Lord's sheep. and Just to show you how little we know of all that was taking place, between vs 18-23 at least 1500 miles were covered by land and sea in 6 vs, so no doubt all kinds of information and exciting stories taking place there that we don't get in on, the Holy Spirit wanted us primarily to see the need to become strong disciples, rooted, and established in the word of God.

Vs24-26

So here we have this quick little cut scene about a scenario that took place in Aquila and Pricilla's lives while they were there in Ephesus, apparently during the interim period that Paul had left them there before he made it back. and This is where Apollos enters the equation, he'll become a key player in Paul's life as well, and we find out a little about him here in these vs and that is that he was born at Alexandria, a city of some 600,000 people the 2nd most important city in the Roman Empire named after Alexander the Great. It boasted a library of over 700,000 volumes, it's where the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures) was developed, and about ¼ to 1/3 of it's population was Jewish. and We read that Apollos was an "eloquent" man, mighty in the Scriptures. This word "Eloquent" is used only here in the NT, which shows the rarity of such men, he alone gets this title, but it speaks of being skilled in speech. He was an excellent articulator of the OT scriptures and a devastatingly dynamic debater concerning God's Word.

"Mighty in the scriptures", that word "mighty" is related to the word "dunamis" from which we get our word "dynamite" he was just a powerful proclaimer of the word of God, and he'd been instructed in the way of the Lord. The phrase, "fervent in spirit" means he was boiling over with passion, he was just on fire for the Lord. and What he had to say, he said accurately. There was only one problem, his message wasn't one of inaccuracy, or insincerity, it was just incomplete. He knew of the baptism of John, but nothing more. Which is to say, he was preaching repentance for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand, he no doubt was aware that Messiah was coming, probably that He'd come. John pointed Jesus out as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. But he knew nothing of the death and resurrection of Jesus, His ascension, the day of Pentecost, or the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

So Pricilla and Aquila take him home for dinner after synagogue and say, "Man that was powerful Apollos, and I've got some exciting news for you." "What?" "The Lamb of God was slain for the sin of the world, Jesus rose again 3 days later, He ascended to the right hand of God, and has given us the Holy Spirit to seal us as His own until the day of redemption!" and They no doubt took him through the scriptures that spoke of these things, shared with him the rest of the story.

2 Things to point out here then we're all but done. #1 We're not to rebuke people in public, they didn't interrupt the service and say, "Hey I appreciate what you're saying, but your account falls short." That would've devastated and humiliated him, instead they sensitively enjoyed the message, then when they got a chance they shared with him the rest of what had happened that he wasn't aware of. Don't rebuke someone publicly, do it privately, with sensitivity, approaching them as you'd like to be approached yourself.

#2 Apollos was teachable, he was a learned man, mighty in the scripture, an incredible articulator, but he wasn't prideful. He didn't say, "Who are you again? Tentmakers! Get a hold of me after you've been through Seminary and maybe we'll talk." He was open, eager to learn and humble, rebuke a wise man and he'll be wiser still, (the bible says). No doubt he went back next week and finished where he'd left off. We ought never come to a place where we're unteachable, or where we don't give ear to someone unless they've got a certain amount of credentials that qualifies them to speak to us. If they know Jesus, if the Holy Spirit dwells in them, they've got something to say, and we should be willing to listen. Apollos becomes an incredible example to us in more than one way.

Vs27-28

John MacArthur says this, "This fervent, brilliant Old Testament scholar also exploded like a bombshell on Corinth's unconverted Jewish community. Like Stephen (6:8-10) and Paul (9:22) before him, Apollos **powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. Refuted** is from refute, an intense double compound word. Apollos was so effective in his discourse that he crushed his opponents, totally disproving them at every point."

God help us to become students of His word, that we might be passionate in our pursuit of Him, that He would train us to become mighty in the scriptures. Why? So that we look really cool and promote an air of spirituality. No, but that we might be a great help, to those who've believed in Jesus Christ through grace.

If you've never believed in Jesus Christ through grace than perhaps today is the day of your salvation. Jesus Christ was in all ways tempted as you are yet with out sin, yet he became sin for you that you might become the righteousness of God in Him. If you want old things to pass away in your life today, and all things to be made new, a fresh start, a clean slate, than believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ repent of your sin and give Him your heart. He'll forgive you, make Himself real to you, you can be born again, brand new today!

Prayer Points: God would You help us, to become a great help to Your body? Help us to remain open, pliable, teachable, help us to be sensitive to Your Spirit in how we deal with and interact with one another. Thank You for the promise of Your presence with us, may we not fear. Lord we know that You haven't given to us a Spirit of fear, but of love, and of power, and of a sound mind. Help us to walk in the peace that You've promised.