

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Faithfulness in Weakness

Acts 18:1-4

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PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: Paul is now in Corinth, a major city in the area and he attempts to bring the gospel to his fellow Jews. But he is not here as a man of confidence and strength, but in weakness. This second journey for the gospel is filled with many trials and hardships and now he is in a major city all alone. What greets him? Debauchery of every type, the arrogance of man on full display and a city desperate for the gospel. So what does a man who is weary and weak do? He seeks merely to be faithful to his calling as an apostle.

I. Introduction.

A. Read 18:1-3.

B. A review.

1. Vs 1 “After these things. . .” Such a simple little phrase that could mean so many things. It is easy to read and think that this is just a turning of a page in a story, but there is much more behind it all.
2. Paul and Barnabas, two faithful men, had finished a long journey, mostly by foot, to bring the gospel into Asia Minor. They had a fruitful time seeing many come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ and establishing new churches throughout the area. They finally came back to Antioch, where it all began and were rest and teaching the believers there, all described in ch 14.
3. Chapter 15 of Acts covers a major gathering of the Church at large in Jerusalem.
 - a. This is where the relationship between the Gentile and the obeying of the Mosaic Law was resolved. This was a huge issue as the gospel went more and more to the Gentiles rather than the Jews.
 - b. There were two key catalysts to what is known as the Jerusalem Council.
 - (1) The first, and most important, was whether a Gentile males was to be circumcised to be saved.

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- (2) Then the second question came, but this time from Jewish believers, what was the relationship with the Law of Moses and the Gentile?.
4. After this Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and began to plan to return to the cities they had visited in their first missionary journey.
 - a. This is where the disagreement over including Mark on the journey that resulted in these two men separating.
 - b. Yet in it all we see the missionary work expand as Barnabas went one way with Mark and Paul took a man named Silas with him. As Paul went up into Syria and the region of Galatia he meets Timothy who now joins his team.
 - (1) Their first major city was Philippi.
 - (2) Then they come to Thessalonica.
5. In Thessalonica Paul again goes to the Jews to evangelize them regarding Jesus as Messiah.
6. In Athens Paul engaged the people in the marketplace and again evangelized.
 - a. This drew a crowd of philosophers and debaters who eventually bring him formally before the philosophical court on what is known as Mars Hill.
 - b. There Paul clearly speaks of the supremacy of God over all other so-called gods and how God calls us to repent and turn to Him alone. He declared that Jesus was raised from the dead and this created a big debate.
 - c. Out of all of this a few believe, but Paul seems to have realized his time was up and moves to what likely was the next city on their list, Corinth. Which brings us to today's passage.

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7. And here we will try to get a sense of the city of Corinth and what is happening behind the passage to try to bring out helpful observations for each of you.
- C. These first three verses seem rather simple on the surface.
1. Notice vs 9. Christ comes to Paul in a vision and tells him to not be afraid.
 - a. And that started my journey I want to share with you. It is a journey that you might find of help to you as you face uncertainties in your life today.
 - b. But this requires a lot of background first.
- D. Paul enters the city of Corinth. A city he does not know and with no one as a companion. He is alone and here we need to learn a bit of the background of Corinth.
1. It is helpful to remember that Greece in the ancient days was made up of various city-states.
 - a. At one point Corinth was destroyed in 146 BC by Rome.
 - b. In 44 BC Julius Caesar rebuilt the city as a Roman colony.
 - (1) By AD 50 the Isthmian games returned to Corinth.
 - (2) Paul came to Corinth in AD 50, so the games had just returned to the city and they were on the minds of everyone. This is the context of 1 Corinthians 9:24-25. He is drawing on a very tangible example for the readers.
 2. The city was situated in a strategic position in the SW end of the isthmus (a narrow strip of land connecting two larger land masses)
 3. Corinth was very wealthy due to their ports and hosted a large population of around 100,000, with some estimates saying 300,00, people in its greater area.
 - a. It was a major trading center.
 - b. It even had a relatively large Jewish population and there is still today in the ruins an inscription on a lintel, "synagogue of the Hebrews."
 - c. The wealth of this city came through trade.

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4. The moral reputation of the city was very poor.
 - a. This was due to diverse nature of its people. Any port city tended to be very rough and tumble, filled with every vice as they catered to the desires and needs of the many merchants and sailors.
 - b. Sexual immorality of every type and rampant greed were two besetting sins and both had fertile ground upon which to grow.
 - c. Outside the city towers what is called Acrocorinth, literally “Upper or Top of Corinth.” This had the Temple of Aphrodite at the very top.
 - (1) It served as a fort, a place for the very rich, but mostly it had temples.
 - (2) At the very top of it was the temple to Aphrodite which was said to house 1,000 temple prostitutes, both male and female. They were not free, but religious slaves.
5. Like most cities of that day the worship was quite eclectic as so many different groups of people came through the ports of Corinth.

This now sets us up to just touch on the very beginnings of this passage through three people, Paul, Aquila, and his wife, Priscilla. Faithfulness in the midst of hardship. Faithfulness because of what they most loved and valued.

- E. Basic outline.
 1. We will first see the faithfulness of Paul
 2. Second, we will see the faithfulness of Aquila and Priscilla.

II. The faithfulness of Paul.

- A. Consider Paul’s situation.
 1. I have already given you the flow of Paul’s experiences leading up to his arrival to Corinth.

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2. This is a man who is weary and alone. Paul has had a breakdown in his relationship with Barnabas.
 3. He then had Silas and young Timothy as his companions and fellow-workers. But he has no idea where they are.
 4. He found no rest in Athens and had to leave early.
 5. But he goes in the Agora, the marketplace, and sees tent makers and goes to them and finds fellowship and a place to live.
- B. But what I want you to note is vs 4. Every single Sabbath he goes to the synagogue. He is trying to convert both Jews and Greeks, meaning Gentiles to Jesus Christ.
1. This is the faithfulness in weakness of which I speak.
 2. He has not had an easy time. He is alone. He must work throughout the week to feed himself. But he does not use it as an excuse to do nothing.
 3. In our day of leisure, comfort and so called self-care, we find it easy to excuse ourselves from the responsibility to be missionaries wherever we find ourselves.
 4. This is a man who could simply say that he was tired and just needed to rest. He needed to simply pull back and make some tents and nothing else.
 5. But he didn't.

III. The faithfulness of Aquila and Priscilla.

- A. The same is true of this wonderful couple.
1. I will introduce them more fully next time we gather together for they are a beautiful example of faithfulness and diligence, mixed with kindness.
 2. We learn in vs 2 that they are Jews.
 3. Note that they too have suffered and had setbacks.
 4. Imagine if our nation decided to require all of us to move because we were Christians?
 5. Life-altering events are not accidents but divinely ordained events.
 - a. A wise person seeks to work in and through these moments, seeking to honor the Lord regardless. Understand that God is working in these things.

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- b. This does not make them easy or even pleasant. You may spend the rest of your life wondering or even grieving in one way or another.
 - c. But, much time and opportunity is lost when you allow events to cause you to retreat or freeze.
 - d. Both of these are very common today in our hyper-psychologized society that focuses on self-care and defining your sin as being a result of trauma.
6. Notice that this couple set up shop and got to work.
- a. But the events of their life did not reshape their decisions related to the Christian faith.
 - b. It merely moved the location and people to which they ministered.

IV. Conclusion.

- A. It is easy to be faithful in the good times. But it is in the hard times that true faithfulness is seen.
- 1. As you trace the journey's and experiences of Paul you find that trouble followed him.
 - 2. Not because he was seeking trouble, but because he refused to be defined by anything other than Jesus Christ.
 - 3. But, it isn't just Paul. This husband and wife are facing life altering events, but they cannot put their faith on hold. They cannot put following Christ aside while they get things in order.
 - 4. It is very reminiscent of Acts 8, Stephen had been stoned to death, the church is under intense persecution and the people scattered. But as they scattered, Luke records that they went out proclaiming the Word, the gospel.
- B. You may have many non-negotiables established in your life, but make sure that the first and foremost one is that you seek to be faithful in your service to God regardless of the circumstances.
- 1. Financial decisions cannot go before your service to your Lord.
 - 2. Wellness decisions cannot go before your service to your Lord.
 - 3. Comfort decisions cannot go before your service to your Lord.
 - 4. Political decisions cannot go before your service to your Lord.
 - 5. Family decisions cannot go before your service to your Lord.

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6. What you see in this passage is a simple glimpse of faithfulness in the midst of great weakness.
- C. As Paul had to learn and what he told the Corinthian church, “*And [the Lord] has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.*” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Benediction

May the God who is from everlasting to everlasting, who has loved you with an everlasting love and gives you everlasting life, now support you with everlasting arms in these days until Jesus comes again. Amen.