

Sermon Title: **Bema Seat- *How We Live Matters***

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

Speaker: Pastor Damian Mericka

Text: Acts 18:9-22

Introduction

“Stand firm, and you will win life.” -Luke 21:19

We began this year with a look at what Kingdom endurance is. ***Standing Firm*** here means *Endurance* and is a very rich word embodying an ***upward, consistent, contagious, and outward*** motion that goes against the current. *It is swimming upstream after Jesus.* We saw this is the work the Spirit of God does in our lives, just as He did in Jesus’ - He leads us upward to higher ground and a higher life in Him.

We also looked at some of the outward challenges we face when going upward with the Spirit, including the spiritual forces of darkness which our on their way downward. As they are being cast out of God’s Kingdom, we are being brought in. This is the nature of our Spiritual Battle. Unlike the generations that came before Jesus since His Ascension the Spirit has now come upon us to take the battle to where it truly is at.

What does this look like lived out in or lives? Following Jesus as His Disciples.



“Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.”

-Matthew 4:19

This series is set to be a journey answering this question- *what does it mean to follow Jesus?* How do we today answer His invitation and see this journey with Him unfold as it did for the first-generation followers of Jesus? Together we will discover anew what it means to follow Jesus- *to be a disciple making disciples culture that **learns, lives, and leads!***

I. Pursue Living for Jesus (Acts 18:9-11)

“And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.’ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” -Acts 18:9-11

Last week we looked at Paul’s arrival to ***Corinth***, a city whose name means ***satiated***. Because of the traffic flow Corinth was a place where many came to make their fortunes either selling or investing. It was a place many came and got lost in. Because of this Paul and his team

strengthened their grip in His and displayed a Kingdom Integrity that came from the inside of them outward into the community. Because of *how* Paul was sharing the Gospel, the Kingdom was growing as heart after heart in Corinth turned to Jesus!

“And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” -1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Paul's Person

Keep in mind Paul's journey to Corinth was one filled with public beating and imprisonment at Philippi, then being run out of both Thessalonica and Berea while others suffered for following the Jesus Paul introduced them to. In Athens he was brought up against the strongest of philosophical and intellectual heights only to be laughed at in front of the highest level of leadership. It is from that place Paul arrives weakened, in fear, and trembling. He is worn out and most like most of us can relate, feeling the PTSD for the next swing of the enemy's arm!

Paul's Message

Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ crucified! This message was central- the very heart of the Gospel. Paul's preaching was Jesus Christ who paid the penalty of sin on the cross. Until someone understands and believes this Gospel (Good News) there is little further to be gained for the Kingdom. We today would do well to mark this and pursue getting this right. It is not the size of the local church but her understanding and obedience to the Lord who saved them! Preach the Cross!

God's encouragement came to Paul through a vision, and this strengthened him to stay here in Corinth longer than any other location thus far. Training and equipping the saints for the work of Gospel ministry, entrusting God for the increase in His timing. In this, Paul recognizes everything from who he is, his story so far, his presence in Corinth, his labor as tent maker and preacher, along with every person who comes to Jesus is all orchestrated by a Sovereign God that is seeing His Son Glorified! *This is living for Jesus, so Saints, let us pursue living for Jesus!*

II. Stand for Jesus (Acts 18:12-16)

“But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, ‘This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.’” -Acts 18:12-13

From the point God brought vision to Paul to encourage him keeping his hand in His, faithfully living for Jesus, until now a significant following is emerging after Jesus. This may be toward the end of the 1.5 years Paul had stayed to labor in Corinth. It was here however, word would

have spread and many of the Jews who were against the Gospel saw the beacon of invitation to gather to Corinth and mount a collective attack on the Apostle.

If the enemy cannot overcome the Truth of the message, nor discourage those filled with the Spirit of the Living God from preaching the Truth, then it is time to turn toward the powers that be. Through the militant arm of Rome, *the Jewish opposition begins efforts to extinguish the flame of Jesus Christ once and for all.*

Think about this- when Jesus was alive, He was a nuisance to them. No matter which angle they came at Him from, there was no advantage that could be gained. Now dead (though we know He Resurrected) His name is not only being named but His following has grown and is reaching out into all the world! ***This time, it's not just the preachers they want silenced; they want their message outlawed!***

Gallio was *proconsul*, meaning he carried the same authority as the Consul who appointed him. This was the voice of Rome in a foreign region; what was decreed by a proconsul would become universal in all of Rome. The region of Achaia would include Corinth. This historic detail from Luke the Author shows us not only the time (AD 49-51) that Paul was at Corinth, but also continues to show his writings witness of a very historic event taking place!

The Place

The place Gallio would reside was called the *tribunal*, or *bema*, which means *judgment seat*. This bema was a raised stone or step in which people would appear before the proconsul, *almost as if a footstool*. It was here matters of conduct were discussed and ruled upon. *It was at this place that a person was weighed not by their knowledge of the Law, but by how they lived according to the Law! (Hold on to this; we are going to come back and finish sermon on this note)*

The Charge

Paul is preaching a message that should not be seen as a part of Judaism. Why? Judaism was a tolerated religion- meaning it was registered and allowed. The Jewish leaders are attempting to show that Paul and his message are not a part of this allowance and should be treated as such and stopped by Rome!

“But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, ‘If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.’ And he drove them from the tribunal.” -Acts 18:14-16

However, before Paul would even get a word in otherwise, God brought the victory! Gallio saw past the Jewish ploy (not his first rodeo) and refused to get swept up into regulating the details of a tolerated religion. In other words, clean your own house. If Rome needs to step in, it will be easier to just burn the whole house down. Washing his hands of it (so to speak), Gallio has

them driven out from before the bema seat- why? No Roman Law had been broken by Paul. Christianity is free to continue spreading under Rome's shadow. ***Paul stood for Jesus!***

III. Unjust Suffering for Jesus (Acts 18:17)

“And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.” -Acts 18:17

Again, someone else suffers for Paul's message. This time it is not even a follower of Jesus! Who was Sosthenes? Remember last week Paul washed his hands of the Synagogue and set up Kingdom headquarters right next door. Soon the then Synagogue leader, Crispus, came to place faith in Jesus along with his household because of the way Paul lived out his faith.

The Jewish leaders would have been upset with Sosthenes due to the expectation upon him to act as their voice before Gallio. As if all of their money went to this attorney whose argument caused them to not only gain no ground, but they also most likely lost any opportunity to silence the Gospel now. In a frenzied uproar, Sosthenes feels the violent hands of those upon himself- his friends, family, and fellow Judaism followers. *But does his story end here? No!*

*“Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,”
-1 Corinthians 1:1*

Perhaps experiencing *the lack of power, love, and self-control* (the opposite of what the Spirit of God brings into us and would have been modeled by Paul and believers) of the crowd he once felt at home with, Sosthenes is now not only a believer in Christ by a co author to Paul's first Letter to the Church in Corinth- the fruit of Paul's faithful living for Jesus! Even when challenges come our way and accusations fly, we must stand for Jesus- our very lives standing upon His Word for the Truth it is. *Peter would say this regarding suffering for Jesus,*

“Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.” -1 Peter 2:18-21

We will suffer unjustly at times for following Jesus. However, let us approach those whom God has placed in leadership with humility and respect their positions of authority require, as unto our Lord. *Let us continue in **living, standing,** and when necessary, **suffering unjustly** for Him!*

IV. Humility Strengthens love in Jesus (Acts 18:18)

“After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brethren and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.” -Acts 18:18

After this experience at the bema seat, Paul continued to labor into Corinth before setting course for his home church of Antioch. Along the way Paul cuts his hair due to having taken on an oath. *What was this **custom** and **oath**?*

The Custom- *The Nazarite Vow (Devotion [Nazarite] and Separation [Holy/set apart] to God)*

“Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the Lord...All the days of his vow no razor shall pass over his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy (set apart). He shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long.’” -Numbers 6:1-2; 5

The length of time was up to the person making the oath. During this oath they were to be set apart- no wine or strong drink, no dried or fresh grapes- even grape seeds were not to touch the skin. There was to be nothing from the outside introduced to detour the mind, heart, and body.

They could not go anywhere near a dead person; unless someone died suddenly then there were sacrifices to fix this by atoning and letting the person start the vow over again. Once the vow was complete, his head (and beard) were shaved, and they locks were to be taken to the Temple in Jerusalem within a certain period of time. So, Paul’s trip home was locked in.

The Oath- *We don’t know; Luke does not tell us.*

Here are my thoughts why (take it for what it is worth). God worked mightily through his most weakened of moments in Corinth, as well as blessing this entire Second Missionary Journey. Paul is alive to continue in his Apostolic anointing for the Glory of Jesus. It is also to embrace the humility that it is truly God working through him; if not for Grace he would still be dead in sin persecuting the church. He was on his way home to his Jewish brethren, as well as brethren in Christ.

“I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,” -Romans 9:1-2

Unlike fasting, the Nazirite Vow was more public. Illustrating Christ within him has become a strong leading of the Spirit in Paul’s life. I wonder the benefit we as believers today would stand to gain with such a vow- to be renewed for those we do life with to see the Jesus we know and love? *To **live** for Jesus, **stand** for Jesus, **suffer unjustly** for Jesus- this can amount to very little if we fail to, through **humility**, strengthen our love for Jesus and others.*

V. Returning Home- Celebrating God's Kingdom!

a. *Planting* the Gospel at Ephesus (v.19-21)

“And they came to ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But on taking leave of them he said, ‘I will return to you if God wills,’ and he set sail from Ephesus.”

-Acts 18:19-21

Paul's *Nazarite Vow* is driving his schedule onward. However even with an agenda, he does not fail to share the Gospel to the Jew first, and also to the Greek and Gentile (Synagogue). Fruit quickly surfaced in Ephesus, and Paul indeed would be led of God back to Ephesus (another sermon for another day).

Note that Paul knew when it was time to leave in difficult situations as well as good, prospering situations. We must be driven by the Holy Spirit, not the fruit of the ministry God has placed us in! <- Someone NEEDS this WORD today!!

b. *Testifying* at Jerusalem and then Antioch (v.22)

“When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.” -Acts 18:22

Went up and greeted the church means Paul landed and went immediately to Jerusalem. The church here is often the understood designation for to birth of the movement; The Church. It would have been here Paul presented his shaven hair at the Temple along with testifying of all that God had done and is doing now in Europe.

From here Paul returns to his sending church, which was strongly Gentile in population, and brings his Second Missionary Journey to an end. *It is here Paul spends time sharing not just what we can read from Luke's hand, but the many details we will need to wait until eternity to hear!*

As we draw this message to a close, I want to ask the question, *does how we live matter?* This message was about **LIVING** for Jesus, **STANDING** for Jesus, **SUFFERING** for Jesus, in **HUMILITY** strengthening our love for Jesus and others- but does all of this really matter? Can we be saved simply by our faith in Jesus alone for salvation?

That moment Paul experienced in Corinth stranding before Gallio would become a major point in his Second Letter to the Corinthian church. Listen to this,

“Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him (Jesus). For we must all appear before the judgment seat (bema) of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending

ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.” -2 Corinthians 5:9-12

Saints, brethren, we are saved by believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our Salvation is by Him and through Him ALONE! Yet, He has given us His Spirit, filling us with all that He has to live our lives transformed for His Glory.

Hear this: this passage underlines the reality that our present-day actions have eternal consequence. The bema seat of Christ is the place where believers stand, not having their knowledge of Christ measured out, but the fruit from their knowledge of Christ.

How we live does matter- it eternally matters. Not regarding our destination, but in the celebration when we arrive at our destination and our lives bear witness of His love toward us returned toward Him!

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.” -Revelation 22:12

*“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”
-Revelation 3:11*

“And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.’”

-Revelation 4:9-11

Will you have crowns to cast before the feet of King Jesus as we worship Him eternally?

Yes, dear saint, how you live today matters.

Will you **live** for Jesus?

Will you **stand** for Jesus?

Will you **unjustly suffer** for Jesus?

Will you **humbly strengthen** your love for Jesus and others?

Will your life be a part of the celebration testifying of Jesus who alone is worthy to receive glory and honor and power?

How we choose to live *today, tomorrow, and every tomorrow after* will affect this eternal experience!