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ACTS 18:1-21

Of all the men God used to spread His Word, we know more about Paul than any don't we? We know a **lot** about Peter and a **little** about the other disciples, but Paul wrote more books in the New Testament and we can read his writings and know about his hopes and his fears, his likes and his dislikes, his moods and his temperaments. **Paul wasn't afraid to open himself up and be vulnerable to us, was he? Paul wasn't afraid to give us glimpses of himself as a person...**

Well, when we read today's Scripture, we're tempted to see simply where Paul was and what Paul did, but if we really look below the surface of the Scripture before us today, I believe we'll see another glimpse of Paul as a person.

Last week, we saw how Paul had stood before the Athenians on Mars Hill and he had preached a profound sermon.

He poured his heart out and told the very learned and cultured men of Athens about **the God who created them**.

He told them how God had **overlooked their sin** for a long, long time, but that now **He expected them to repent**.

We saw last week that Paul's sermon had very little impact on those smug, complacent, pagan philosophers of Athens...so Paul left Athens in search of more receptive hearts.

Paul headed west and traveled about fifty miles to the city of Corinth. Corinth wasn't like Athens. If Paul experienced **culture shock** when he went to Athens, he experienced **moral shock** when he arrived at Corinth.

Corinth was a **commercial** center...It was also a **cosmopolitan** center, but it was also the center of the cult of the love goddess, Aphrodite. The temple of Aphrodite was one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world and at one time had ten thousand temple prostitutes "doing business" there. Things were so bad at Corinth and Corinth's immorality was so well known that folks would call someone a "Corinthian" in order to insult him or disparage his reputation.

But, as bad as Corinth was, it was better than Athens. WHY? The Corinthians received the Gospel and the Athenians didn't.

I believe many times we look at folks and we say,
"He really needs Jesus, but you know, he's too far gone...His sin is too great...He (or she) has done so many bad things that God can't even begin to get his (or her) attention."

I believe we would have said that about the people of Corinth. But, Paul was willing to go there and preach Jesus to them because Paul had a heart for evangelism. **Paul wanted all men everywhere...Jew and Gentile alike...to come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.**

But, having said all that, I want us to remember that Paul was human, not super human. And I believe we'll see that human side of Paul today.

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Remember what Paul has been through...Paul has met with success and failure in his evangelism. Where he has been successful and won folks to the Lord Jesus, he has been beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and run out of town.

Where he has not been persecuted, like Athens, he felt like a failure. Paul must have come to Corinth feeling down and depressed and discouraged and maybe even despondent... probably physically exhausted.

Remember as we said last week, Paul's not traveling by plane or train or car... He was walking...ALONE!!

Acts 18:1-3...

Here we're introduced to a man named Aquila and his wife, Priscilla.

These folks were Jewish believers and they had been commanded by Claudius to leave Rome. See, the Gospel was being preached in the synagogues and it was creating such controversy that the emperor told all the Jews they must leave Rome. At that time, Christianity was looked upon by non-Christians as simply another sect of Judaism.

What I want us to see about Aquila and Priscilla is that...

These folks **just happened** to be Jewish believers.

These folks **just happened** to come to Corinth at the same time Paul did.

These folks also **just happened** to be tentmakers as Paul was.

What a coincidence!! I mean, here was Paul...alone, without friends, in a strange and immoral city and he **just happened** to hook up with precious Christian friends who also had undergone persecution and who also **just happened** to have the same skills to make a living that Paul did.

Apparently Paul was low on funds or he wouldn't have had to be working as a tentmaker...but wasn't God good to give him friends with whom to stay and work?

Verse 4...

Paul did in Corinth what he had done everywhere else he went. Wherever there was a synagogue, Paul went there first, and he reasoned...he dialogued...he discussed with and answered questions from those who were there...and he did this every Sabbath. His heart's desire was that his own people would come to salvation.

Verse 5...

Here we see Paul's companions, Timothy and Silas, coming and joining Paul. And they brought with them a love offering from the churches in Macedonia. We know that first...because Paul mentions this offering on over in his epistles to the Philippians and the Corinthians and also because he began devoting himself completely to the word.

Can you see the goodness and the graciousness of God in all this? Sometimes we have to read "between the lines" to see God in situations. For example, in the **Book of Esther**, God's name isn't even mentioned, but He was at work in the life of Esther and He was at work in Paul's life and He's at work in ours, as well.

Paul is alone...so God provides him with new Christian friends.

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Paul needs a place to stay...so God provides him a place.
Paul needs money...and Paul's new friends are in the same line of work as Paul.
Paul needs to minister full time...and Paul's other friends, Timothy and Silas show up with a love offering from his converts in Macedonia so Paul is able to get down to the business of ***"solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ."***

Before we get to the Jews and their response to the Gospel, let me just ask you...
Have you ever found yourself in circumstances like we just saw Paul in?

Now, I don't believe any (or many) of us have found ourselves in a pagan city...needing friends **and** money **and** a place to stay...**and all alone...**
But, there are many ways to be alone...we can be in a crowd and be alone, can't we?

Are you alone today because of a lost job?

Are you alone today because of a broken relationship?

Are you alone today because of a broken heart?

Are you alone today because of a wayward child or grandchild?

Are you alone today because of something someone said that hurt your feelings?

Are you alone today because you've allowed a root of bitterness to creep into your heart because you've refused to forgive that someone who's hurt you?

Are you alone today because the Christmas holidays are supposed to be happy and your dear precious wife or your precious son or daughter or mother or father isn't here to share them with you?

If you fit into any of these categories, I want to tell you...you aren't really alone. Jesus said, "I'll never leave you...I'll never forsake you."

God has promised He would meet all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

God has promised you peace that we cannot even ever begin to comprehend.

God has promised that His mercies are new every morning.

God has promised you His grace that is sufficient to meet every need you could ever possibly have.

God has promised you joy unspeakable and full of glory...and He has promised us so, so, so, much more!!!

Look around you at the Christian friends God has given you.

Look around you at the way God has and will provide for you.

Look around you and you'll see that you are not alone!

Verse 6...

The Jews resisted Paul and they blasphemed Paul and when they did this Paul said,

"That's it! I've done everything I know to bring you to Jesus. I've said everything I know to get you to see the truth.

If you go to hell, you go having heard the way you could have avoided going there.

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If you insist on being lost, just know this...you could have been saved!

I've shared Jesus with you as best as I know how...and you would not believe...now I'm going to the Gentiles!"

Does this mean Paul would never again witness to the Jews? No, but it did mean that so far, his preaching had had little impact upon them.

Not only that, but Paul knew if things happened the way they had in the past, it wouldn't be long before the Jews would come against him physically and would also incite the Gentiles against him. Paul must have felt so discouraged!

Verses 7-8...

Here we see God giving Paul at least a glimmer of encouragement. Crispus was a Jewish believer and he and his whole household came to faith in Christ... ***"and many of the Corinthians who heard him, believed and were baptized."***

Hearing...Believing...Being baptized. Have you heard and have you believed and have you been baptized? If you were baptized before you really believed you weren't baptized, you were just dunked. The order is ***hearing, believing and being baptized!!!***

And Paul continues to bring the Gospel to whomever reads these verses!

Verses 9-10...

This is a very revealing verse. It reveals to us

- 1) that Paul was fearful, otherwise God wouldn't have admonished him **not** to be fearful...
- 2) that God knows our fears
- 3) that He is able to do something about them

God came to Paul in a night vision and He told Paul several specific things:

- 1) ***"Do not be afraid"...*** God doesn't waste His words. God knew the depths of Paul's heart and He comforts and exhorts Paul with the words, ***"do not be afraid..."***

By the way, you and I don't need visions, since we have God's written Word. However, we need to know where to look for His promises in His Word. Do you know where to find comfort for your every need?

- 2) ***"...keep on speaking, do not be silent..."*** Speaking was what God had called Paul to do. Obviously Paul must have been tempted to stop. Maybe as God looked at Paul's thoughts, He could see that Paul was thinking,

"You know, my speaking hasn't been very effective. It's not bearing a lot of fruit for God's kingdom. Maybe I need to try something different. Maybe I should get into contemporary Christian music. Or maybe I should go on TV and have healing lines. Maybe I could get Peter and some of other guys to come and have a panel discussion – a seminar on the Creation and the Flood and the Virgin Birth. Maybe I could get my own talk show..."

Maybe if I did some of these things, folks would listen and I could win more people to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Maybe it really is Jesus plus...!"

But, God didn't tell Paul to change his methods. God told Paul to keep speaking...keep teaching...

Why? Because God has chosen to bring men and women to Christ through the Word...**2 Timothy 4:2**...Paul gave this teaching to Timothy, but **Paul** learned it in Corinth.

"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ."

Paul would later say that he hadn't come to the Corinthians with persuasive speech...but God said, "**Paul, keep on speaking and leave the results to Me. It's not your speech that's going to save people...It's My power working in that speech that saves people.**"

3) "...I am with you..."

Did Paul ever find himself wondering if God **really** was with him? I mean did Paul ever **doubt** if God was **really** there with him?

I think Paul always knew God was with him, but you know, it's possible to **know** one thing and to **feel** something else, isn't it? I believe Paul was **feeling** that God wasn't with him.

Have you ever felt like God has abandoned you? If so...let me tell you...God hasn't left you...He's with you!!

4) "...no one is going to attack you in order to harm you..."

Paul's times and our times are in God's hands! God will protect us until our work for Him is done here on this earth and then He'll call us home.

Think of Billy Graham with all his health problems...and God's still using him. One of these days, God will say, "Billy, there's no more for you to do on earth for Me...come on home."

God had lots more for Paul to do...

5) "...I have many people in this city."

Of all the things God said to Paul in this vision, undoubtedly, this was the most important!

"But where? God this is a pagan, corrupt, sinful, heathen city. Where are your people?"

If God said, "I have many people in this city", it must have been because God, who alone is able to see the future, was looking ahead and he was saying to Paul,

"By the preaching of the Word, Paul, I will bring many people to faith in My Son. They may not seem like they belong to Me yet, but I've claimed them for My own..."

Verse 11...

This marks a change in Paul's ministry. Before now, Paul had been moving from place to place. He would spend a week here, a month there, and then he would move on to another place.

But as soon as God spoke to him, Paul changed his mind and stayed right there in Corinth. And do you know what happened? **People heard, they believed and they were baptized.** Those folks God said He had there in Corinth came to faith to Him.

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By the way, the problems the Corinthians were having before salvation still plagued them after salvation. Paul later wrote two letters to the Corinthians to address their sin problems. Satan doesn't give up easily. In fact, he comes against us much stronger after we give our hearts to Jesus, doesn't he?

We cannot take a text like we've just seen and simply transfer it to ourselves as if God is saying the identical things to us. I mean, so far, we don't have to worry about anybody attacking us or harming us for speaking out for Christ. We might lose friends...we might alienate family...we might lose our jobs...but so far, we don't get physically persecuted for witnessing for the Lord Jesus, do we?

But, I believe God has placed us in a particular place, a particular family, a particular job, a particular neighborhood because He has a work for us to do there...

And for that very reason we should be encouraged and stay there and finish the course the Lord has laid out for us...to the best of our ability until He moves us on.

Who knows? God may have many people in our neighborhoods and our families and our jobs...folks He wants **us** to speak His Word to!!

Our lives are to an example for those folks we know...an example to lead them to Jesus!

Verses 12-15...

These verses tell us that indeed the Jews brought Paul before the judgment seat...and we see here what separation of church and state really means...

Separation of church and state never has meant that the church should stay out of the government...but that the government should stay out of the church...and that the government should not use the church to rule the people.

Anyway, the proconsul literally threw this case out of his court.

Verses 16-17...

The wrath of the Jews came down on poor old Sosthenes! But, guess what? Sosthenes got saved! We see him mentioned by Paul **1 Corinthians 1:1**.

Paul calls him "my brother."

Verse 18...

Paul had made a vow. I wish we had the time to go into all this...how this was a Nazirite vow and how it was rooted and grounded in the Old Testament.

I believe the significant thing here is that even though we don't know what it was...Paul took this vow very seriously. He kept it. Maybe it was a vow of real commitment to keep on preaching after the Lord gave him the night vision.

Do you ever make vows to the Lord? You know...God's Word tells us it's better not make a vow to God at all if we're not going to keep it...but Paul kept this vow...whatever it was.

Verses 19-21...

Here we see that Priscilla and Aquila pulled up stakes and went with Paul to Ephesus. We see that Paul again went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. He left Ephesus but promised, if God would let him, that he would return to them.

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I hope we see in Paul today something to do and something **not** to do. I believe when Paul reached Corinth and he was discouraged and depressed, he was really borrowing trouble. He was looking at the past and believing he would experience exactly the same thing in Corinth that he had gone through in Lystra and Derbe and Antioch and all the other places.

The story is told about Abraham Lincoln going to Washington to be inaugurated. Folks kept asking Lincoln if there was going to be a Civil War, and in response to that question, Lincoln would give this as their answer...

In his circuit-riding days Lincoln and his companions, riding to the next session of court, had crossed many swollen rivers. But the Fox River was still ahead of them; and they said one to another, "If these streams give us so much trouble, how shall we get over the Fox River?"

When darkness fell, they stopped for the night at a log tavern, where they fell in with the Methodist presiding elder of the district who rode through the country in all kinds of weather and knew all about the Fox River. They gathered about him and asked him about the present state of the river. "**Oh yes,**" the preacher replied, "**I know all about the Fox River. I've crossed it often and understand it well. But I have one fixed rule with regard to the Fox River...never cross it till I reach it.**"

The Bible tells us not to borrow trouble this way...

"Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof..."

Jesus told us in Matthew 6:25 and 34 that we're not to worry about tomorrow...

"For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?"

Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

So, I hope we learned from Paul today not to borrow trouble...

I also hope we see in Paul today the way God wants us to conduct our lives and the ministry He's given to us...

May we not **be afraid**...

May we **keep on speaking**...

May we **be aware that God is always with us**...

May we know **God's hand of protection**...

May we know **God has folks out there who need the Gospel given to them!**