

Continue to Speak

Acts: More than a Movement, Part 2

Acts 18:1-23

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Good morning to you all. As Judy said, and as you may have noticed, June is Missions Month. I am really excited for this month for two reasons. The first reason is because this month isn't really that different from what we normally do as a church. What I mean by this is that we aren't a church that highlights missions for a month and then lets it sit in a closet for the rest of the year. I am so glad that we are a church that cares about the gospel going wide to all peoples 365 days of the year. The second reason that I am excited for the month is because it is different and unique. We will have nineteen of our missions partners sharing about the work God is doing here in Wichita and around the world. We will have many opportunities to encourage and support our partners, so we can be a church that is actively and continually sending them. And to be honest I am really excited about the flags! Big thanks to Lori Day for loaning us her collection for the month.

Before we get to Acts 18 today I want us to look back on Acts 17 at the application points from last week's sermon:

- Pray for a heart that loves the lost.
- Pick one person to talk to about Jesus.
- Listen to one person's worldview.
- Invite one person to respond to Jesus.

Some of you may have dominated these applications and I am excited for you about that. That is something we can all celebrate together because we are on the same team in this mission. But if you aren't one of those people who did all of these that's ok. I didn't do all of these applications and to be honest I really only did the first one and it happened on Sunday evening. Christy and I decided to brave the restaurant world with Weston and Cora and go to dinner at Red Robin. There were pros and cons to this decision, because sometimes it is just easier to cook the food at home than to go out to eat with kids. If you are a parent I'm sure you can understand. The dinner actually turned out wonderful, though, and that was due to our waiter being fantastic. He was fast, helpful, and kind. As he brought us our check the application of having a heart that loves the lost came to my mind. So I told him that I'm a pastor at First Free Church and he replied that he was wondering because he noticed the Student Ministries shirt I was wearing. I knew that he was busy and couldn't sit down and talk so I asked him if there was anything that Christy and I could pray for him. He gave me a few requests and each day I have prayed for him. I do not know if he believes the gospel but I have prayed that he would believe if he doesn't. I have prayed that God would bring more people into his life to discuss the worldview he has. And I have prayed that someone would invite him to respond to Jesus.

I want us to be people who love the lost, engage in their lives, share the gospel, and call them to respond. Each of our missions partners is engaged in ministry that does these things. We will have many opportunities this month to see how they are doing it, encourage them to continue, and be encouraged to personally do it as well.

But life is not always encouraging. Often times it can be very discouraging. Have you ever been so discouraged in a situation that you just wanted to quit and throw in the towel? It happens when we look at a large project and are overwhelmed and don't know where to begin. Maybe it was when your expectations went unmet for the hundredth time in a row. Maybe it was when you or your spouse lost a job and you didn't know how you were going to get through. Or maybe it was when you shared the gospel repeatedly with friends or family and they continually refuse to repent and believe. So you are tempted to throw in the towel and assume that they will never believe. You become content to move on to someone else and be done with them. In Acts 18 this is the situation that Paul finds himself in after he leaves Athens and arrives in Corinth. He is discouraged and frustrated because of the opposition to the gospel he is encountering. But we will see that there is a call to persevere in sharing the gospel despite the opposition. We need to continue to speak. The reason this can be done is because God is with us and because there are many who have been appointed to be saved.

Acts 18:1-23¹

¹After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶And 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." ⁷And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." ¹¹And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

¹²But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, ¹³saying, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law." ¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵But 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." ¹⁶And he drove them from the tribunal. ¹⁷And 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.

¹⁸After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. ¹⁹And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. ²¹But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus.

²²When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. ²³After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

This is the Word of the Lord.

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

In our text this morning, first we will look at how God is with us during opposition and then finish by seeing how we are called to speak the gospel because there are many people to still be saved.

WE CAN CONTINUE TO SPEAK THE GOSPEL BECAUSE GOD IS WITH US DESPITE OPPOSITION.

So Paul has left Athens and traveled the forty-five miles to Corinth.² I am not going to go into much detail about the city of Corinth. If you would like to know more I would encourage you to look on our website at Pastor Josh's sermon on 1 Corinthians 1:1-9.³ Corinth, in a nutshell, was a prosperous new city where the important and up and coming people were at. It was a city full of trade, money, and sin. It was a city that screamed a need for the gospel and it was also a city where the gospel would easily spread as people came and went.

Paul wasn't there long before he made some friends and got to work. Aquila and Priscilla were Jewish believers who had just come to Corinth because they and the rest of the Jews were asked to leave Rome by the Roman Emperor Claudius. Claudius did this because he felt the Jews were creating civil disturbances over the debate of Jesus being the Christ. And civil unrest was a big no-no in Rome. So in order to deal with it Claudius kicked them all out in AD 49.⁴ Aquila and Priscilla played a big role in Paul's ministry from here on out. They worked with him as they made tents but also partnered with him in sharing the gospel throughout the region. Paul's ministry strategy in Corinth was similar to that of Thessalonica and Berea in Acts 17. He got to town, settled in, and then went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and Greeks to persuade them that Jesus is the Christ. In today's text, verse 4 tells us that Paul is persistent in doing this. He did it every Sabbath, week after week. Silas and Timothy found Paul doing this when they came to Corinth from Macedonia. Verse 5 says that he was "occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus." There was nothing that preoccupied his mind as he worked to help the Jews know who Jesus was. His days and thoughts were consumed with sharing the gospel with the Jews in an effort to help them see the truth and be saved. He was occupied with the word.

As I thought about this I wondered about the times in my life when I have been occupied with the word in the way that Paul was. There have been times in my life when I have been solely focused on people knowing who Jesus was. This is usually when I am with students at Student Life Camp or FOCUS. On these weeks and weekends my life is consumed with the word. But there are many other weeks of the year when my mind is not occupied with the word and people knowing the gospel. Instead I am distracted by tasks that aren't very urgent or important. I become focused on things that will not matter for eternity and I neglect the matters that are eternal. My question to you is where are you at in this? How is your life occupied with the word and people knowing that Jesus is the Christ? Do people in your workplace, friend circles, or neighborhood know that you believe that Jesus is the Christ? How is your life reflecting that?

Paul had invested his time, energy, and life into sharing the gospel with these Jews in Corinth. After investing a great amount of time in anything it can be frustrating if you don't see any results. Do you have something in your life that causes you great frustration? I actually do. It is the Perplexus Epic. It is a small ball that has a maze inside of it with 125 levels. The goal is to get the metal ball to run through all of the plastic tracks and levels without falling off. I can only play with it for about five

² Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

³ Josh Black, "[Set Apart](#)", 1 Corinthians: A Beautiful Mess

⁴ Bock

minutes before I get frustrated and need to put it down for a week. Only investing five minutes of my time causes me great frustration. Paul on the other hand has poured his time and energy into reasoning with the Jews for weeks and maybe months. But the Jews didn't believe him. In fact, they opposed him and reviled him. Paul loved the Jews in this synagogue. He wanted them to know the truth and be saved. But he was also frustrated and discouraged with them to the point that he said he was finished. Verse 6 says that, "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.'"

Now Paul isn't just throwing a frustration tantrum as he says these words. And if there is anyone who can be frustrated with the Jews it is Paul. So far in Acts the Jews have stirred up whole cities against him, run him out of town, tried to stone him to death, and put him in prison. Paul has been patient but he finally says that he is done. He has theological grounds for telling the Jews this. The shaking the dust off his clothes is reminiscent of what Jesus tells the disciples to do in Luke 10 if they are not received with hospitality. It was a sign that Paul was breaking fellowship with them.

He followed this by saying that their blood was on their own heads and that he was innocent in the matter. This is a reference to Ezekiel 33:1-9. In these verses God makes Ezekiel a watchman for the nation of Israel. A watchman has certain responsibilities. If he sees an enemy army coming to harm the city, he needs to blow the trumpet and warn the people. But if the people hear the trumpet and don't heed the warning then their blood will be on their own head. If they had taken the warning they would have saved their life. On the flip side to this if a watchman sees the army coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people then the blood will be required of the watchman.

In this same way Ezekiel is to warn God's people. Verses 7-9 say, "So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul."

Paul was a faithful watchman to the Jews in Corinth. He repeatedly told them that Jesus was the Christ but they refused to listen. Paul was faithful to tell them the gospel but they refused to believe and because of that Paul was innocent. The Jewish Corinthians were responsible and deserved the consequences for their unbelief; they had heard the truth.

There are many people today who are like the Jews in Corinth. They have heard the gospel but they refuse to believe. My grandpa is a man who has heard the gospel many times in his life. He has heard it from my sister, her husband, Christy, and me. But he doesn't believe. He doesn't revile or oppose us when we share with him but he doesn't want to believe it. So the question can come to mind, "Will he ever believe?" Should we continue to go on sharing with him or should we focus more time on other family members who don't believe? Maybe you contemplate these questions as well with your family or friends who don't believe. Is there a time to stop sharing the gospel with a person? This is what Paul is experiencing in Acts 18. But the Lord encourages him in a vision in verses 9-11. Look at what it says: "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.'"

The Lord gives Paul very specific instructions and encouragement. He tells him to not be afraid, to continue to speak and not to be silent. And the reason that Paul can do this is because the Lord is with him. The promise in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 was true for Paul and it is true for us today. Jesus said to the disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

We can continue to speak the gospel to people despite the opposition that we face because the Lord is with us! Opposition will happen. When it does we need to continue to speak and we do not need to be afraid.

This is not an empty promise for Paul because God follows through with it while Paul is still in Corinth. Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half after the vision. While he was there we can presume that he continued to speak and was not silent. And while he did that, the opposition continued and came to the point where the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the Roman tribunal, or court. The charge brought against him was similar to the charges against him in the past. Verse 13 says that the Jews claimed that Paul was persuading people to worship God contrary to the law. During this, God protected him. The attack that came upon him would not harm him. Paul didn't even have to defend himself because Gallio, the Roman proconsul, (the guy in charge) did it for him. He said that Paul had not done any real offense and that this was a matter that the Jews needed to settle themselves. Gallio saw it as an internal Jewish matter and not one to bother the Roman government with. So he drove them all out of the tribunal. God was with Paul and did not allow any attack from the Corinthian Jews to harm him.

But does this promise of no harm coming to Paul extend to us today? After all we are also called to continue to speak the gospel and we can do that because God is with us. However, the answer to the question is a simple no. The promise that God made to Paul was for a specific situation while he was in Corinth. We know this to be true because it was just a few years later that Paul was arrested, taken to Rome, and eventually executed for his faith. He was harmed by the opposition. But he was not harmed eternally. They could not harm his eternal security before God, his eternal life. Paul had been saved by Jesus because of his repentance and belief in Jesus' death and resurrection. His life was secure in God's hand and there was nothing that could change that. This is true for us today. If you have confessed and repented of your sins and believed the gospel, there is no opposition that can harm your eternal life. You have been saved. But if you have not believed, then you are still under God's wrath because of your sin and there is no way you can stand up against it. So I urge you today to believe the words of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

This is the message of the gospel. But if we believe that no harm will come to us if we are sharing it and doing God's will, we are setting ourselves up for a world of hurt. It's like saying if I do the things that God wants me to do then nothing bad will happen to me. I can tell you from experience that this is a bald-faced lie. If you are living your life for God and being bold in sharing the gospel you will be opposed. But the parts of this vision that remained true until the end of Paul's life, and are true for us today, are the commands to continue to speak because God will always be with us. And the reason we are to do this leads to my second point.

WE NEED TO CONTINUE TO SPEAK THE GOSPEL BECAUSE THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE TO STILL BE SAVED.

If you do a brief Google search on the number of Christians in the world you will soon find that Christianity is the world's largest religion, boasting some 2.2 billion adherents or over 30% of the world's population. The world today is literally full of Christians according to the statistics. But this number is probably inflated because there are many people who would call themselves Christians but in reality they are Christian in name only. But even if we could accept that all of the 2.2 billion people were Christians, there would still be 5.5 billion people who aren't Christians. Sweet goodness that number is staggering! I cannot even fathom what 5.5 billion grains of salt would look like, yet alone that many people who have been created in God's image but are still dead in their sins. It is because of this fact that we need to continue to speak the gospel because there are many people to still be saved.

We have seen throughout the Book of Acts that people are believing the gospel left and right and the same is true in Corinth. Verse 8 tells us that "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized." These are some of the people that God had in the city but there were many more to still be saved. In the vision the Lord says to Paul, "I have many in this city who are my people." Telling him that the reason he needs to stay is because there are many people who still need to hear and will believe it. God knew who the people in the city were and he knew who would repent and believe.

Now I'm not going to get into a hyper-Calvinist rant and draw a TULIP diagram to explain unconditional election and irresistible grace. But when we read this statement by God it does highlight God's control over and knowledge of those who will believe the gospel and be saved from their sins. We don't know who these people are and neither did Paul but this encouraged him to stay in Corinth despite the opposition that was confronting him. And the fruit from this extra time there was many people being saved.

There are some ministries that move fast and have loads of fruit right from the beginning. Like when Peter shared the gospel at Pentecost in Acts 2 and three thousand people believed. And there are ministries that take longer, but that doesn't mean they have less value. Many of our missions partners are called to serve in very hard places where the fruit of their labor is slow. I want to highlight some of them this morning. The first is Sam & Julie. They are serving for the long haul with their three kids in a closed country. They are there to learn the language, live with the people, build a wide network of relationships, help translate the Scriptures, and disciple people to know who God is. They don't know how long this will take or who will be involved but they do look forward to seeing how God will work because he has promised to save people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. The other partners are Sarah Roberts and Shige and Luann Nakazawa. They are all a part of the ReachGlobal team in Tokyo. Shige and Luann have been there for several years and Sarah, who is a member of our church, is raising support to join them this year. Japan is a very hard place. Many people in Japan have never heard the name of Christ or they view Christianity as a cult and are immediately opposed to it. In these two countries there are millions of people who have not yet believed the gospel.

There are also many people in Wichita who have not yet believed. We have not been commanded to save people, because that is God's role. But we have been commanded to continue to speak and to not be silent here in Wichita.

So how will you do that? Or how can you do that? Many of you are in the last dinner preparation for your Common Table group. You are now well skilled at inviting, scheduling, cleaning your house, and speaking to people you don't know. Boomshockalocka, you have done it! You have the skills and now you just need to change up the people. Think of the people you know who do not believe the gospel. Start with the person that you wrote down last week. Then pick people that you see often. These would be co-workers, teammates, and neighbors. Once you have a good list of names invite them over for dinner this summer. And as you eat the first of several meals together learn as much as you can about them and share the truths about God and his Word with them. When you do this let me know because I want celebrate with you.

Or another example is while you are with your kids at a park look for another person to talk to. There are so many times when we have been to Edgemoor Park on the swings and there is another parent pushing their kid on the swing as I am pushing Weston or Cora. Even in small interactions like this there are often opportunities to share Christ, pray for others, and love people well.

To close our time, I want us to briefly look at where Paul goes at the end of our passage. He leaves Corinth and from there he travels to Ephesus, then to Caesarea, Jerusalem, and finishes in Antioch. This finished his second missionary journey as he arrived at his home base of Antioch. The church in Antioch was Paul's sending church. Paul returned there after each of his missionary journeys and then after being encouraged and supported he departed again. We are the home base for many of our missions partners in the same way that Antioch was for Paul. So as many of our missions partners are here this month I would ask that we do our best to encourage them to continue to speak because there are many people who need to hear the message of salvation. I also pray that when we hear them share that we would be encouraged to continue to speak the gospel as well.