

Encouragement from Jesus

Acts 18:1-28

Main Point: *The Lord Jesus encourages believers by assuring them of His divine presence (God with us), protection (God for us), and plan (God through us).*

Introduction: Good morning! Please open your bibles to Acts 16. If you are new to the Bible, you can find Acts 15 following the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)...

Orienting the Text: Where we are in the story

Last week we did a review of chapters 1-17 to catch us up. I summarized the message of Acts in this way: The book of Acts reminds believers that *God's ultimate plan* is to spread His *global kingdom* by exalting Jesus as Christ/Lord through a *Spirit-empowered church*.

Today, we follow Paul as he goes into a new city called Corinth. Those of you familiar with the bible know that there are 2 letters in the New Testament to the Corinthians (written by Paul). So we are going to see how this church in Corinth gets it start. More importantly, we are going to see how Jesus offers personal encouragement to Paul. Wouldn't that be wonderful to receive personal encouragement from the Living Jesus Himself? Well, the good news is that the same encouragement Jesus gives to Paul is the same encouragement He offers to us today. So, if you are here today in need of direction, guidance, wisdom, encouragement – if you are hungry for something concrete and applicable from Jesus, well, Acts 18 is for you. Lets pray...

Exposition of Acts 18:1-17:

The gospel goes to Corinth - Acts 18:1

What do we know of Corinth? Corinth was an important port city for the region, and it served as the capital of the province of Achaia. It had actually been deserted and destroyed in 146 BC, but Julius Caesar (the first great emperor of Rome) had it rebuilt. It was known for its wealth, diversity, and for its corruption/immorality. Sin like a "Corinthian" was euphemism common to the time. However, a small Jewish enclave existed there and that's where Paul begins his ministry.

Paul meets Priscilla/Aquilla - Acts 18:2-4

Paul follows his normative pattern of testifying about Jesus in the synagogues. Luke highlights the meaning of two new converts, presumably a married couple, Priscilla and Aquilla, who will later play an important role in the mission and discipling people.

*Just as an aside...(findings about marriage/serving with youth leaving church).

Paul devotes himself to testifying that the Christ is Jesus - Acts 18:5

Luke tells us that once his companions arrived, Paul devotes himself even more earnestly to preaching and teaching the word, specifically testifying that the Christ is Jesus! The word order here is slightly different, typically Luke says that Paul testifies that Jesus is the Christ, but here it is the opposite – the Christ is Jesus. Now it may mean nothing and just be a differing expression. Whatever the case, the main focus of Paul's ministry is: Jesus!

Acts 18:6-8

As usual, it doesn't take long for trouble to begin for Paul. His synagogue preaching always invokes a reaction from the Jewish leadership. Paul "shaking out his garments" is a sign of judgement. And so he turns to the Gentiles, who seem to show more openness. Again, this is by God's design as the gospel goes forth, to the Jew first and then the Gentile, we see that Jewish hostility leads to Gentile acceptance. In this case, Paul moves next door and uses the space of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God (probably referring to a God-fearer, a Gentile who worships the God of Israel, but now turns to Jesus). However, note what Luke tells us: Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, becomes a Christian. Wow! Don't miss the significance of this!

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Now, on the surface it appears that things are going great for Paul – two new disciples who become key leaders (Acquilla & Priscilla), fruit from the synagogue ministry, and (presumably more fruit) now at Titius Justus’s residence, and most encouraging of all, Crispus the ruler of the synagogue becomes a believer!

From all appearances, and compared to what he’s experienced in previous cities, Paul should be very encouraged. But what if he wasn’t? What if instead of feeling encouraged, Paul is actually beginning to feel tired, weary, worn-out, and fatigued? What if he is tiring of all the constant debating, trying to convince people of Jesus, and continuously getting stiff resistance from others, especially his own countrymen?

The reason I bring this up is what happens next, which I think is the heart of this passage and shows us something of the heart of Jesus as well.

Jesus encourages Paul - Acts 18:9-11

In the night, the LORD (and remember, the majority of the time we see a reference to “Lord” in Acts, its referring to Jesus), comes to Paul and tells him to keep going. It’s a personal word of encouragement to Paul from Jesus Himself. And he gives Paul 3 reasons why:

- 1) *I am with you* (assurance of Jesus’s divine presence)
- 2) *No one will attack you* (assurance of Jesus’s divine protection)
- 3) *For I have many in this city who are my people* (assurance of Jesus’s divine plan)

Now, I am going to spend some time unpacking the significance of this encouragement for us in just a few minutes as we talk about the application, but here I want you to see how this personal encouragement from Jesus actually works itself out in Paul’s life.

Jesus protects Paul - Acts 18:12-13

The synagogue leadership makes a united attack on Paul by going to the Proconsul (governor), and like what we saw in Thessalonica, make accusations against Paul concerning Roman laws. If you recall, these cities gained their political viability by swearing an oath to Caesar, an allegiance to him as their ultimate “lord”. However, Paul was preaching that Jesus was not only the Christ (Messiah), but the world’s true Lord. All of a sudden the tension starts to build right after he gets this assurance from Jesus. But then look what happens:

Acts 18:14-17 - The circumstances turn in Paul’s favor, and his ministry is allowed to continue on. Exactly what Jesus said would happen, happens: no one harms him, and all of Satan’s attempts are thwarted.

In other words, Jesus stays true to His promises for Paul! The word of personal encouragement Jesus gives him works in perfect accordance with His plans for Paul.

Main Idea: *The Lord Jesus encourages believers by assuring them of His divine presence (God with us), protection (God for us), and plan (God through us).*

Application: How Jesus encourages His Servants

So lets go back to the specific encouragements that Paul.

Promise #1: *I am with you* (God with us - assurance of Jesus’s divine presence)

Throughout the Old Testament, God gives His people the promise and assurance of His divine, personal presence being with the people. In fact, it is the very heart of what the whole of salvation actually is; for what does it mean to be “saved” other than to be in fellowship with God. During our Advent series, I made the claim that the heart of the bible – the heart of God – is found in Lev. 26:9-11.

How does this happen? Well, in the book of Matthew, chapter 1, the very first thing Matthew tells us about Jesus is that He is Immanuel, *which means God with us* (Matt. 1:18). Jesus is Lord, Savior, King, Master, Judge,

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fully divine, fully human – but all of this is grounded in this one true reality: God with us. Do you know the LJ in this personal way? If you are here today as one of His followers, guess what? This promise is for you!

Promise #2: *No one will attack you (God for us - assurance of Jesus's divine protection)*

Now, Paul does not get universal, unconditional protection. How do I know? Well, he suffered in other places, and will suffer again as we will see later in Acts, and eventually is beheaded for his faith and devotion to Jesus. BUT, if Paul were here today, and we were to ask him, “Hey Paul, did Jesus fail you?” He would say, “No way.” Throughout Paul’s life, he believed that God was for him, not against him. That everything that happened to him – both good and bad – was all under the sovereign, watchful eye of the Father and the Son, who were guiding him along in his life and preparing him for eternity. Listen to his own words: Rom. 8, 2 Tim. 3

In this instance, Paul was not attacked so he could carry out God’s purposes in Corinth. Other times, God allowed him to be attacked, so he could carry out God’s purposes in other places, and eventually he is martyred so Paul could carry out God’s purposes for his legacy. Do you believe, as Paul did, that the Living Jesus, and God the Father, are absolutely, resolutely, totally, and completely *for you*? It takes real faith to believe that, hold to it, and cherish it – but it doesn’t make it any less true!

Promise #3: *For I have many in this city who are my people (God through us - assurance of Jesus's divine plan)*

Finally, Paul is promised fruit from his ministry. That as Paul continued to preach and teach about the Lord Jesus, a mysterious process would occur that we call conversion would take place. The technical term for this process is called “effectual call of the gospel”, where the Holy Spirit sovereignly softens human hearts and draws them to the savior. And that in every place Paul goes, God has people there who belong to Him, but just don’t know it yet because they haven’t heard about Jesus. Now this raises questions about the sovereignty of God and the will of human beings.