

Under the Lord's faithfulness, we should faithfully persevere in gospel ministry

As we've been working our way through the Book of Acts I wonder if you, like me, start to fill out a picture in your mind of what the apostle Paul was like. We're not given a physical description of him, but we know he was Jewish, he was stoned by an angry mob to the brink of death, had undergone a beating and imprisonment in Philippi, and from [Galatians 4:15](#) we could speculate that he had some problem with his eyes. Evidence like this leads me to paint a picture in my mind of a man that was pretty rough looking, who would maybe come across initially as a hard man.

But regardless of physical appearances, we do get a picture painted for us of what Paul was like inwardly: intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In fact, in our passage this morning we get a look into the inner man of Paul, his needs and his fears. *We learn that this man who spent so much time traveling and pioneering gospel works and planting gospel churches was a man who knew the importance of fellowship and received great encouragement from it. We learn that this man who could undergo beatings and imprisonments and threats and rejection was a man who also had very real fears, and needed encouragement from time to time to stick to the work and continue laboring in faith.* Paul may have looked unbreakable and seemed unflappable, but it was the Lord who sustained him in gospel ministry. So **under the Lord's faithfulness, we should faithfully persevere in gospel ministry.**

Scripture Passage: Acts 18:1-17

Work and Witness (vv.1-4)

- v.1** *"After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth."* - Paul continues to visit the major cities of the Roman Empire. Athens was an intellectual capital of sorts, and Corinth was a center of commerce. Corinth was situated near an isthmus that connected the Peloponnesian peninsula to mainland Greece, and it had a port on each side of the isthmus that served the two seas. In fact, a railway was built that helped to transport cargo and even small ships across the isthmus to the sea on the other side, saving the 200 miles of sailing around the southern end of the peninsula. Not only did Corinth find itself situated on an east/west trade route for the sea, but also on a north/south trade route by land. James Montgomery Boice says Corinth was commercial, cosmopolitan, and corrupt. To be referred to as a "Corinthian" was taken as an insult, insinuating that someone was sexually immoral.
 - Paul wasn't discouraged by any of this, but knew that this was a key city for the gospel, and if commerce could come in and go out from this city, so could the gospel.
- vv.2-3** *"And he found a Jew named Aquila...and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade."* - Paul's traveling companions had been left behind to disciple the believers in Macedonia, so he arrives in Corinth alone. He finds this couple, Aquila and Priscilla, and takes up lodging with them and begins to work.
 - Rabbis were required to learn a trade, and they taught that if you don't teach your son a trade you teach them to be a thief.
 - Paul has a great deal to say in his letters about the goodness and necessity of work.
 - Ephesians 4:28** *"Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."*
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12** *"For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living."*
 - Paul himself lived this out. **Acts 20:34-35** *"You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*
- v.4** *"And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks."* - Paul spent much of his time working, but every Sabbath he was found reasoning in the synagogue, preaching the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. This was conversation with the purpose of convincing of the truth of the gospel.
 - This was the rhythm of Paul's life during this time. His life was a life of work and witness. He labored to provide for his needs and spent his Sabbaths reasoning in the synagogue. During this time of tentmaking Paul was no less an apostle. I don't think Paul made a distinction between his work, his witness, and his worship. I think that for Paul all of life was worship, and all of life was to be a witness, and work was simply part of that, and a blessed privilege.

2. How about for you? Do you make a distinction between your work, your witness, and your worship? Is the week only secular because of your rhythm with work, and your Sunday is sacred because it's a day for worship? What would it take to tear down that division so that all of life was sacred, even when you're clocked in at work? Can you do your work to the glory of God? Does your work benefit others? As you serve your fellow man, can you make that connection that you are also serving God, and can you do it in such a way that the goodness and magnificence of God is evident in your work?

Transition: In Corinth Paul began his ministry by tentmaking, living a life of work and witness. Next, not in contradiction, but in accordance with work and witness, Paul shows that preaching was his priority.

Preaching as Priority (vv.5-8)

1. **v.5** "When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word..." - From Paul's writings we can piece together that the Macedonian believers sent financial assistance to Paul, which allowed him to focus all of his time and energy on preaching (**Phil. 4:15; 2 Cor. 11:9**).
2. **v.6** "And when they opposed him and reviled him, he shook out his garments..." - As Paul increased the intensity of his preaching through more time and energy, so also the opposition increased to the point where the Jews were becoming hostile against Paul, speaking blasphemy and slander against him. At this he shakes out his garments and says he will now go to the Gentiles to preach.
3. **v.7** "And 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." - This is a strategic location, not to flaunt a fruitful ministry in the faces of the Jews, but Paul's desire was ever for their conversion, and this location would allow them to see and hopefully be provoked to jealousy, that they might be saved (**Romans 11:11-12**).
4. **v.8** "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." - For Paul, this was the aim. He worked as a tentmaker to enable him to live in this strategic city and preach the gospel. When he receives support from Macedonia he sees an opportunity to give all of his time and energy to preaching, and so he does. As a result of his preaching he sees fruit in Corinth.
 1. My hope is that seeing Paul as a tentmaker may help us identify a little more with Paul. He was a man, he had needs, he worked to provide for those needs. But his focus was always ministry, and his priority was always preaching. Work doesn't need to be seen as an obstacle to ministry, but as an avenue for ministry. Heralding the gospel is something we've all been called to, regardless of our tentmaking skill.

Transition: Is it time for Paul to move on, to go to the next strategic city to preach? Perhaps now with the conversion of Crispus Paul knew that opposition was increasing against him and the heat was going to be turned up. But at this point the Lord intervenes and speaks to Paul, encouraging him to exercise faith over fear.

Faith over Fear (vv.9-11)

1. **vv.9-10a** "And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent...'" - I think here the Lord gives us a look into the heart of Paul. We read about Paul praying and singing hymns while in the stocks in the inner prison in Philippi and read about him standing before the intellectual elite on Mars' Hill and think the guy must be invincible, unbreakable. But here the Lord gives us this insight, that Paul battled some fear. We're not told the severity of this fear, or when this fear started, but it was present.
 1. But notice the Lord gives a promise. "...for I am with you..." **Matthew 28:19-20** "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."
 2. The gospel is good news, proclaimed through words, so we must go on speaking. **Romans 10:13-17** "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."
2. **v.10b** "...for I have many in this city who are my people." - JI Packer, in his book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, writes, "So far from making evangelism pointless the sovereignty of God in grace is the one thing that prevents evangelism from being pointless. For it creates the possibility—indeed, the certainty—that evangelism will be fruitful. Apart from it, there is not even a possibility of evangelism being fruitful. Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen, and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to preach the Christian gospel."

3. **v.11** “*And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*” - Paul was encouraged by the Lord’s word to him, and even more than just being encouraged, he was obedient to it. He did go on speaking and didn’t go silent. He exercised faith over his fear, taking hold of the promise of God to him.

Transition: Paul exercised faith over his fear, taking hold of God’s promise to him. And, as God always does, he shows himself faithful, providing providential protection for Paul.

Providence Protects (vv.12-17)

1. **vv.12-13** “*But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul...*” - If the Lord speaks in a vision to you about not fearing and not being silent, you can be fairly confident that something is coming that would be cause for fear and silence. So, unsurprisingly, the Jews rise up against Paul and bring him before the regional authority in Corinth. They try to convince Gallio that Paul is breaking the law.

2. **v.14** “*But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews...*” - Here it is, the divine interruption. Providential protection. John Stott writes, “Jesus would keep his promise to protect him; the chief means of his protection would be Roman law.”

1. While in Philippi Paul was able to leverage his Roman citizenship to the advantage of the gospel and the reputation of the church. Here the Lord provides protection for Paul through the Roman law, and Paul’s ministry benefits. We read in **v.18** that he stayed on for many days longer before leaving Corinth.

1. **This doesn’t mean that Paul took up politics or overly concerned himself with them, but where they could be used to the advantage of the ministry of the gospel, he used them. We might find similar opportunities in our privileges as citizens to vote. Vote for those candidates and ballot measures that will serve the purposes of God and be most in line with Scripture. Research candidates and discover where they stand on important issues like abortion and religious liberty. Write letters to office holders. This is what Wayne Grudem, in his book titled *Politics*, calls “significant Christian influence on government.” He says that voting is the very least we should do.**

Conclusion: Under the Lord’s faithfulness, we should faithfully persevere in gospel ministry. Are you troubled, worried, or uncertain? Look to the Lord’s promises. **Romans 8:28, 31, 37-39** “*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose... What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” **Matthew 28:19–20** “*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.*” Continue on down the course that the Lord has laid out before you and called you to walk. It won’t always be easy, and won’t always be free of trouble, but it will always be in the Lord’s presence. **Psalms 16:11** “*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*”

Family

Table Talk

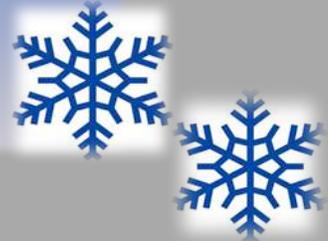


December 30, 2018



GOD'S TRUTH

Under the Lord's faithfulness, we should faithfully persevere in gospel ministry



Key Verse

"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."

Acts 18:9-10 (ESV)

Family Discussion ?s

1. Read over the key verse. Next, read Joshua 1:9. What similarities can you find between what Paul was called to do and what Joshua was called to do?
2. Can you think of what they might have feared, or why they needed encouragement to be strong and courageous?
3. Has there ever been a time in your life when you've known that obedience to God's command would take great courage? What was the situation, and what was the obedience you were called to?
4. What promises does God give regarding obedience to his commands?
5. How is the letter to the Hebrews an encouragement to us in this area?

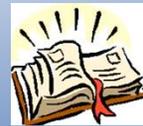
TABLE READING

Lead your kids further into God's Word...

1. Joshua 1:9

4. 1 John 5:3; Matt. 11:30; 1 Samuel 15:22

5. Hebrews 12:25-29, 13:5b-6



Scripture Memory: Luke 1:32-33

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." - Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (ESV)