

Keep On Speaking

Acts 18:1-22

Pastor John Miller

One of my favorite authors (I don't often throw out authors, and you'll have to go on a search to find any books by him because they're all out of print) is V. Raymond Edman. He wrote a book called *The Disciplines of Life*, which is my favorite all-time book. Raymond Edman was at one time the President of Wheaton College in Illinois. He used to speak to the students in chapel services, and one of the things he would say over and over was the phrase, "It's always too soon to quit." I love that. You might want to write that down and not forget that because so often we get discouraged and want to give up and quit. There might be someone here tonight that wants to quit. Maybe you want to give up on your marriage. Maybe you want to give up on your ministry. Maybe you want to give up on a relationship. Maybe you want to give up on some task that God has called you to do. Maybe you've gotten too much opposition, too much persecution, you're facing too much difficulty, and you just want to throw in the towel. I'm sure that we've all at least been there or we're going to be there, so we need to not quit and keep going.

The great British preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon used to say, "By perseverance the snail reached the ark." I like that. I get this picture of this ark with the animals going and everybody's in the ark. They look way out in the distance, and here comes the snail, you know. It's like, "Come on, buddy, you can make it. You can make it!" By perseverance the snail made it finally into the ark. That's what we need. We need to continue. You say, "Well, Pastor John, why are you introducing this study with this topic?" I want you to look at Acts 18:9 before we look at verse 1.

In Acts 18:9, "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision," and this is what He said, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace." This is one of my favorite stories in the Bible where Paul was discouraged. Paul wanted to give up. Paul wanted to stop. Paul wanted to throw in the towel. Paul wanted to say, "I've had enough. This isn't good. I'm not going to do this anymore. I'm not going to preach and tell other people about Jesus," so the Lord came to Paul personally in a vision at night and spoke to Paul and said, "Don't stop speaking." Now, when the Lord said to Paul, "Be not afraid," it's obvious that Paul was afraid. Some translations have, and I think rightfully so, "Don't be discouraged. Hold not your peace but speak." Even the great Paul the Apostle was discouraged, and we're going to come back to this thought in a few moments in our study.

Don't be discouraged in thinking that you're alone in your discouragement. Don't think, I'm the only one that gets discouraged. Some Bible scholars actually believe that Paul was depressed here, wanted to give up, was just discouraged, and wanted to throw in the towel. If Paul, the great man of God who was just always going strong and always so confident in the Lord, the man that wrote, "...all things work together for good to them that love God...are called according to his purpose," the man who said, "I can do all things through Christ which

strengtheneth me;" if he reached points in times in his life where he was actually discouraged or despondent and maybe disheartened and wanted to quit, then I'm encouraged that God can use me, that God can encourage my heart, and God can help me to keep going.

Why was Paul discouraged? Let me give you a couple of reasons before we go back and study this verse by verse. Paul was discouraged because of the difficulties he was facing. He's been on missionary journeys for years—the first and the second missionary journey. Notice in Acts 18:1, "After these things," why does Luke say that? What things? Well, after they had been whipped, beaten, falsely accused, and thrown into a dungeon in Philippi. I know that the Lord sent an earthquake and opened the prison and the jailer was converted, but that's a pretty difficult thing to go through after being stoned in Lystra, being run out of town in Derbe, and all of the places that he was at, all of the opposition, all of the persecution, all that he was facing, as well it's believed that Paul was actually sick during this time and under the weather, at least being afflicted in his body. I want you to hold your place here in Acts 18 and turn to 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. I'm jumping around a little bit. I don't normally do this, but I want to kind of set the stage for this chapter.

In 1 Corinthians 2 Paul says, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God." You're probably wondering why I went to Corinthians and how I know that this ties in with Acts. It's because in Acts 18:1 (we didn't read it entirely yet) Paul comes to Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul is explaining when he came to Corinth (we get a little commentary) about what was going on in his mind and in his heart. In Acts 18:1, he comes to Corinth. Here in Corinthians, he's explaining about when he came, what was going on. So, in 1 Corinthians 2:1, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified," which is interesting because he just came from Athens, the intellectual capital of the world. Now, he's kind of through with all that intellectual stuff and just says, "I want just to preach the gospel and the Cross of Christ."

Notice 1 Corinthians 2:3. He says, "And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." That is Paul's own commentary on Acts 18, "I was with you in weakness," indicating that he was perhaps sick, "and in fear," he was timid, fearful, and discouraged, "and in much trembling," so Paul was going through a very difficult time in his life. He said (verse 4), "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," the reason (verse 5), "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." I read all that because I wanted you to see that in verse 3 he said, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." Go back with me now to Acts 18.

Paul also had seen meager results in Athens (the end of Acts 17), not a lot of people had come to Christ. Thirdly, Paul was alone. That was another reason why Paul was probably discouraged. I believe God wants us to do ministry in teams with other believers so we can encourage one another. If you're alone, you have no one to pick you up. The writer of Proverbs

says, if there's two of you, then you have someone to pick you up when you fall. It's a good idea when you're serving the Lord to have a team, and Paul was alone. He was alone in Athens. Now, he's alone again in the city of Corinth; and believe it or not, there is good indication that Paul was lacking funds. He was lacking financial support. He was down on his money, and he was actually going through a difficult time. That's indicated in 2 Corinthians 11:8-9. I want you to turn there with me. Trust me, we will study Acts 18 tonight.

Just look at 2 Corinthians 11:8-9. Paul says, "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service," that's not literal, okay? Paul's not a robber. You gasp, "I can't believe that's in the Bible." Paul was just actually saying that he was letting other churches support him so that he could minister to them. He's speaking to the Corinthians (again, the same context of Acts 18) because he wanted to preach the gospel of God freely. In verse 9, he says, "And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me," I want you to note that statement there. Paul's talking about his finances. "...the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself." It's seen in that one statement, "that which was lacking to me." Go back to Acts 18. I know I could've done this in a little different sequential order, but I wanted to kind of set the stage.

When Silas and Timothy come from Macedonia to meet Paul in Corinth, they actually brought money for Paul, an offering, so that Paul, who at that time was working with his hands making tents to do ministry, could be free to go out and simply preach the gospel. No doubt, that was again an issue of discouragement. Many times today missionaries and Christian workers get discouraged when they face opposition, when they are seeing meager results, when they're trying to serve the Lord alone, or when they're lacking funds or support. There's a lot of ministries that are great ministries that really deserve to be supported, encouraged, helped, and a lot of them are going without. The rejection in the synagogues that we're going to see in our text in Acts 18:4-6 where Paul faced opposition and the Jews continued to dog his steps, persecute and hassle him, basically sets the stage for now God is going to encourage Paul.

I want to give you the four ways that God is going to encourage Paul. There's a lot of different little nuances to them that we can go into, but I want you to see how God encouraged Paul. First, God sent helpers, other believers, to encourage, work with, and to help him (verses 1-8). Let's read the text beginning in verse 1. It says, "After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth," we'll come back to those two cities and talk about them for just a second, "And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them." He joined himself to Priscilla and Aquila. "And because he was of the same craft," that is, Paul, "he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue," Paul did, "every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks," or Gentiles. "And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia," in northern Greece, "Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ," Messiah. "And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto

the Gentiles. 7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard," or next to, "the synagogue. 8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." Go back with me to verse 1.

Paul has left the city of Athens and has gone now to the city of Corinth. (If I can have the map again for just a second.) Paul began over here in Antioch, went to Derbe, Iconium, Lystra, and this other second Antioch of Galatia. He traveled over, and from Troas got the Macedonian call. They've been to Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. He's gone down to Athens, last Wednesday night, and now he's taken the trip from Athens over to Corinth. I want you to look at this. This is northern Greece, Macedonia. This is southern Greece, and notice this almost like a peninsula here that's connected with a little tiny finger of land known as an isthmus. We could talk about that for quite some time, but I've actually traveled to this part of Greece. This is the temple of Apollos. The site is pretty well intact there. They have a bema seat uncovered where tonight we're going to see Paul brought before Gallio. You can go to Greece and actually visit the site of the ancient city of Corinth, but remember that peninsula in the south is connected by a little thin narrow strip of land. (Can we have that other picture of the canal?)

This is known as the Corinth Canal. I've actually stood on this bridge, but this canal was in ancient times an idea...go back to my other map. This little peninsula here, you see how if you're sailing from this part of the world over to Greece and you want to sail around, it's about 200 miles to go around. It's less than three miles to cut through this little thing here and to go through here. It's kind of like the Panama Canal, so instead of going all the way down and around, the ancient ships would sail to a port here. They would carry the cargo across the isthmus, load another ship, and sail up to Italy from there to Rome. Caesar Nero was the first to start the project, and it wasn't until later that they finally were able to cut this channel, this canal, through and be able to carry it. What I wanted you to see was the spot where Corinth is located in Greece because it's a major thoroughfare from north to south and from east to west.

The city of Corinth was famous for several things. It was the capital of southern Greece known as Achaia. It had a population of over two hundred thousand. It was a cosmopolitan city. There were all races and classes of people there. It was a very large cosmopolitan city. It was a city of great commercial wealth because it was on the major trade routes; but most of all, it was a corrupt and sinful city. Anyone that knows about Corinth knows that it was famous for its Temple of Aphrodite. That temple was actually the place where they had the sacred prostitutes. They were priestesses. They were actually prostitutes who would come down into the city from the hill and the temple and do their thing, but it was a part of their religion and worship. The city of Corinth was a very debauched, very sinful, very wicked place. In the Greek theater, whenever a person was depicted as being from Corinth they were always depicted as being drunk or intoxicated. It was actually an insult if you weren't from Corinth and someone called you a Corinthian. That was like the ultimate chop, you know, the ultimate insult, "You Corinthian, you," because they were just really worldly, wicked, wild individuals. That could be one of the reasons why Paul was discouraged because he was in a very very perverted, sinful dark wicked place. He was seeing very little results, a lot of opposition, and he

got discouraged so God had to come and encourage him.

How did God do that (verse 2)? It says, “And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife,” when it says “come from Italy,” that’s a reference to Rome. The background for that was in 49 A.D. that Claudius actually ex-communicated all of the Jews out of Rome. This is where the Bible is consistent with non-biblical history. We know that this actually took place in about 49 A.D. Aquila and his wife Priscilla made their way to Corinth, and Paul shows up and meets them. It doesn’t say whether they were already saved, but that seems to be the inference. It seems to be the inference that they were already Christians. There is no indication that Paul led them to Christ; and if they were already Christians, then the question is how? The answer could possibly be the day of Pentecost. These believers from Pentecost migrated back to Rome, and a church is already started in Rome. There are Christians in Rome. There’s a church in Rome, and these were Jews who were Christians that end up in the city of Corinth but open their hearts and became friends with Paul. In verse 3, they open their home. “And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them.”

Have you ever been traveling and your tired and homesick? You meet other Christians, and they open their home and welcome you in. It’s just like a little slice of home for you. I’ve traveled a lot, not so much as I used to now, but in years past I used to travel a lot. Just yesterday I was reminded of my travels to west Australia and a family that I met over there named the Carmody’s—Pastor Keith Carmody, his wife Helen, and all of their children. When I was over there preaching, they opened their home to me and brought me in. I got to know them, and they got to know me. We’re still good friends, and that was like thirty years ago. I watched their kids grow up and go into the ministry and all kinds of stuff. Just the comfort that it would’ve brought Paul to be with this couple and to be in a home. Maybe Priscilla was a really good cook. Maybe she made some really, really good falafels or something, you know, and Paul was stoked to get to hang out there, but he became good friends with them. God used them to encourage Paul, and I thank God for individuals in my life that God has brought to encourage me in the ministry that God has called me to. We also see the importance of... they’re not apostles. They’re not officially pastors. They were what we would call laypeople or laymen and women serving the Lord. They were a husband and wife team, too. What a wonderful thing when husbands and wives can work together to serve the Lord and to be a team working together for the things of the Lord.

This really cool couple...I can’t wait to meet Priscilla and Aquila, their names even rhyme. Can you imagine meeting them? “Hi! We’re Priscilla and Aquila.” It’s like, “How does that happen?” You know, they have names that really rhyme with each other, and they just loved the Lord. They served the Lord and became good friends of Paul, co-workers with Paul that God used in the ministry to encourage Paul. They were also tentmakers. They opened their hearts, they opened their home, and they opened their hands and worked together with Paul (verse 3), “for by their occupation they were tentmakers.”

Every Jewish boy learned a trade. Even if you were going to be a religious leader, a scribe, or a

religious teacher, you still learned a trade. If you were going to be a rabbi, you still learned a trade. You learned to work with your hands. The Jews said that if you don't teach your son a trade, you teach him to steal. Paul was a scholar, but he was also taught the trade of tentmaking. They would actually make tents out of skins or hides. The idea there in the Greek could also actually be used for he was a leather worker. In the area of Tarshish, where Paul was from, they were famous for this animal fur or hair that they used to make a cloth. They would use that to make tents as well. I think it's interesting that some feel that when Paul said that we must rightly divide the Word of truth, he literally was saying we must cut it straight. He might've been alluding to his own trade of tentmaking, that when you cut the hides, you have to cut the seams straight and sew them together in the making of these tents. We actually use this today. It has become a figure of speech for somebody who is a minister, a missionary, or is serving the Lord but they have a job, a secular job, and they're working and doing ministry at the same time.

This Pastor Carmody in west Australia that I've mentioned has had a job his whole life. He's pastoring a church and working. He's soon to retire from his secular job and be full-time in the ministry, but he's been a "tentmaking" pastor. We use that phrase for "tentmaking" where you go out and support yourself in the work of the ministry. That, by no means, discounted the biblical teaching that those who preach the Word should live by the Word, and you can read about that in 2 Corinthians 9, 10, and 11. He makes it very clear that those who preach the Word should also live by the Word, but Paul worked with his hands so he wouldn't be a stumbling block or an offense to anyone. He probably made tents during the day and preached at night or vice versa, but he was busy with his hands serving the Lord.

Notice (verse 4) Paul's method was going into the synagogues, "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks." Notice the two statements in verse 4. It says, "he reasoned," and he "persuaded." Paul was primarily a preacher and a teacher; and yes, a tentmaker, but he only did that to support the ministry. That wasn't his calling or his number one ministry. He only did that to facilitate what he was doing. You might be a plumber, a truck driver, work in a bank, or a realtor. I don't know what profession you're in, but you only do that to free yourself up to be able to serve the Lord. "And he reasoned ...and persuaded."

How is it that there are Greeks (verse 4) in the synagogue? Every synagogue had a section where they would allow Gentiles, who were known as God-fearers. They began to believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Maybe they hadn't fully proselyted into Judaism, but the synagogue was divided up. The synagogues in those days actually sat men on one side and women on the other. They actually sat in the synagogue by their profession, so they'd have a little tentmaking section over here, and maybe Paul sat down with Priscilla and Aquila and got to know them there in the synagogue.

It says that there were people who "opposed themselves," or opposed Paul's preaching. Whenever you preach the Word, you can bet satan will bring in his opposition—satan will come and attack. "And when Silas and Timotheus," verse 5, I don't want to skip that, "were come

from Macedonia," which is northern Greece. They were probably still up in Thessalonica and then came through Athens, "Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ," Messiah. It's possible that reference in 2 Corinthians 11:8-9 that we read, that Paul and Silas at this point (verse 5) brought the offering from the churches of Macedonia so that Paul could then be free from his tentmaking job to be able to full-time study the Scriptures and preach the Word, but there was opposition. There will always be opposition—man's free will to oppose, "and blasphemed."

I want you to notice what happened. Paul "shook his raiment," garment, "and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles." What is Paul saying there? Paul is using an expression or a figure of speech that was common in the Old Testament, especially with the prophet Ezekiel. The imagery there is that of a watchman. Every city had a watchman, not a watchman as in fixing a watch. They didn't have watches in those days, but he would be a watchman on the wall, a watchman on the tower. He would be a lookout for the enemy who would come and attack the city. The concept was that if the watchman was negligent and wasn't diligent in watching as the enemy would come to attack and people would die, then that watchman was responsible for the death of the people in that city. It was a responsibility, "I'm there to protect, watch, and to blow the horn when the enemy is coming; but if I fall asleep on my watch, and the enemy comes and people die, then I'm responsible."

That concept is carried over in the preaching of the gospel. If I fail to tell other people about Jesus Christ, then in a sense their blood is on my hands; but if I'm faithful to let them know about Jesus and to preach the gospel, to warn them and the consequences of rejecting Jesus Christ, then I can say I am free from the blood of those who have now heard the good news about Jesus Christ and the warning about the judgment that will come. That doesn't mean that you go around today telling everybody, CLAP, CLAP, CLAP, CLAP! "I'm finished with you. Go to hell. I'm free," you know, kind of a thing, but that concept is taught in the Scriptures. As a pastor, I have a responsibility to make sure that I preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God, that I preach the gospel and not compromise it, water it down. I sometimes will see televangelists on tv preaching a feel-good, health and wealth, positive confession gospel. There is no sin, no repentance, no Cross, no judgment. There's the love of God, but what about the judgment of God? What about the needing to be saved and turn from sin? I think, I wouldn't want to be that individual come judgment day, because they have a responsibility just as that watchman on the wall needs to warn about the impending judgment or the danger that's coming, or else they're responsible. That's basically what Paul was doing.

The Jews also had a little antic that they would do whenever they would pass through Gentile territory. They would shake the dust off their sandals. They didn't want any contamination from Gentile territory, so he shook his raiment saying, "I'm free. It's no longer a part of my responsibility," "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles." Remember when Jesus was being tried before Pilate and Pilate says, "Shall I crucify your King?" The Jews all cried out, "We have no king but Caesar." They cried, "Crucify Him!" The crowd cried, "His blood be upon us and on our children." It's kind of a crazy concept,

but here he's using this imagery of the Old Testament watchman on the wall, "I'm free." Behind that is a theological thought that man is a free moral agent—he can choose to reject or accept Christ, or to resist or surrender his life and believe.

Verse 7, "And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus," he officially and formally makes this declaration, "I'm through with you Jews. I'm no longer preaching here in the synagogue," and he moves out of the synagogue and goes right next door. How's that? He's in the synagogue, leaves the synagogue, and starts a church right next door to the synagogue; so all the Jews coming to church sees this ministry going on right next door, and the guy's house, his was named Justus. Justus, some believe, could also be the man by the name of Gaius, who is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. It's possible that he was a Gentile.

It says, "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue," right next door, this guy by the name of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, gets saved. Maybe he snuck over in the middle of the service and thought, I'm going to go listen to Paul's preaching. He "believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." Notice the order. They believed, and then they were baptized. Baptism is not necessary for salvation, belief is. Having believed and been saved, then they are baptized. It's an outward showing of an inward work. If you've studied the book of Corinthians, you know that this Crispus (verse 8) is also mentioned in Paul's letter to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1:14 where Paul actually says, "I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius." Evidently, Silas and Timothy were baptizing. Maybe Luke is there now, I don't know, but Paul wasn't baptizing.

Another little footnote, for Paul the Apostle to say, "I thank God I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius," indicates that baptism is not necessary for salvation. If baptism were necessary for salvation, Paul wouldn't be saying, "I thank God I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius." There are some, too, that falsely teach that baptism is something you have to do in order to be born again. It's known as baptismal regeneration. Again, Paul wouldn't have said that had that been the truth. That's certainly not taught in the Scriptures, but it's interesting that there are now believers in Corinth who are getting saved. I've got one more quick turn I want you to make in 1 Corinthians 6. I want to give you a little bit of insight into the kind of people in Corinth that got saved. Many of you are familiar with this passage (verse 9). Paul starts seeing fruit—people coming to Christ, people being saved in Corinth. Notice as he describes it, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate," which is homosexuals, "nor abusers of themselves with mankind," he's not done yet, "Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Then notice verse 11, "And such were some of you," he's talking to the Corinthians. Didn't I tell you that Corinth was a bad place?

A man by the name of Ray Stedman in writing about 1 Corinthians and the sin and wickedness of Corinthians (he pastored in Palo Alto, California and the San Francisco area), actually said 1 Corinthians could be called 1 Californians—not much different than San Francisco, L.A., or

some of our big cities today. Notice the kind of people that were coming to salvation. It's a marvelous, marvelous thing that God's grace and God's mercy can save anyone—fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, abusers of themselves with mankind, sadistic sexual perversions, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners. We won't have a "that's me" kind of service. I won't have you all stand as each one of your categories are being read right now, but here we are right now. These are descriptive of our past lives, "...such were some of you."

It's believed, and I think rightfully so, when Paul was writing to the Romans that Paul was in Corinth. Have you ever read Romans 1? All of the sins that are listed there and he lists man's degeneration ending with the reprobate mind. It's believed that Paul was in Corinth writing to the Romans, and he's just, "Oh yeah, fornicators; oh yeah, effeminate." He's writing, "Oh yeah, there's one over there." He's writing it down as he's looking out the window at the city of Corinth. He's writing that horrible list to the Romans.

Go back with me to 1 Corinthians 6:11. It says, "And such were," were, past tense, "some of you." Praise God that that's in our past, "but ye are washed...sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus," how? "by the Spirit of our God." Amen? Isn't that great? Maybe when we were reading that list you go, "Oh man! I'm in there in a couple places." Thankfully, we have been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by what? By His Spirit, so it's a past experience. God has forgiven us, sanctified, and justified us. Go back with me now to Acts 18.

So, the Lord encouraged Paul even though he still faced some opposition by sending him Priscilla and Aquila, and (verse 5) Silas and Timothy. I call it the Timothy touch. He gives him his old friends back, and he gives him some new friends. The second thing God did (and we're going to move a whole lot faster) in verses 9-11 is God spoke to Paul. We've already touched on it, but go to verse 9. "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city." Guess what the first thing Paul did? (verse 11) "And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." When I read verse 11, I want to just cheer, "Yay!" Aren't you glad Paul didn't give up?

I'm glad I haven't given up over the years. It's easy to get discouraged. It's easy to want to quit. It's easy to want to throw in the towel. I know from experience, being a pastor for many years, that there are those discouraging times and those times when you don't see the fruit, you don't see the response, you don't see the hunger, and there are other issues that you're dealing with. You think, This isn't worth it. They don't pay me enough. Why did God call me to do this? It's not the pay. It's not the problems. It's the call of God that keeps you going. We're going to see that tonight in the text. I certainly know what it's like to be discouraged. I certainly know what it's like to have my fears, to want to give up; but the Lord is the One that comes and speaks to your heart and keeps you going. When you're down and discouraged, that's what you need. You need a fresh vision—you need God to speak to you. Amen? You need to hear God's voice and know that God has a purpose and God has a plan.

I want you to think about this for just a moment (verse 9), God has to tell Paul the Apostle not to be afraid to speak? That's radical! Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation...to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," but all our heroes have feet of clay. They're all human. They all get discouraged. The great Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon I quoted tonight, stunned his congregation, six thousand people in the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. He declared, "I'm subject to such fits of depression and discouragement that I would never want anyone to go to these depths." We sometimes think that God's messengers are always sailing on cloud nine and don't realize that they are as human as anyone else and face these times of discouragement.

You might be there tonight. Maybe you're not a pastor, maybe you're not a missionary, maybe you're not even a full-time Christian worker, but you're a Christian trying to witness to your family. You're trying to share the Lord on the job. You're trying to win your neighbors. You're trying to pray for your husband or wife, and you're discouraged and want to give up. You think, What's the use? Well, the Lord came to Paul personally. I love that, that God cares enough about us His servants that He would come to us personally, He would come to us individually. The Greek would actually be stop being. It's in that present tense, stop being afraid. God would never say to Paul, "Stop being afraid," if he wasn't afraid. It's like Paul, "What me? Well, I don't know what You're talking about, Lord." The Lord knows our weaknesses. He knows what we need. He knows what's going on in our hearts. "Be not afraid," stop being afraid, "but speak, and hold not thy peace." It's a sad day when Paul is afraid to even speak and preach the gospel.

Notice what the Lord tells him in verse 10. I love this, three things. First, God gave him His presence. "For I am with thee," I am with you. It almost sounds like the words of Jesus in the Great Commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," and He said, "lo, I am with you...even to the end of the world." Jesus promised to never leave us or forsake us. "Paul, I am with you." Paul knew that, but he probably lacked a sense of God's presence. A lot of times we know in our minds, "I know God's with me, I just wish I could hear Him or see Him or experience Him."

The second thing the Lord says, "Not only do I promise you My presence, but I also want you to know that I'm going to give to you My protection." He says, "and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee," I'm going to protect you. I'm going to watch over and take care of you, and we're going to see that He does that. The third thing He says is, "I have a plan," so you have My presence, you have My protection, and then God has a plan. This is an amazing statement, "for I have much people in this city." You're thinking, What?! Run that by me again? That's like being in Hollywood, you know, and you think, I'm the only one that's saved in this whole city. God says, "No. I've got a lot of people in this city. Don't stop preaching." Again, there's a theological implication here. I don't want to get too sidetracked, but I can't help but talk about it.

The context of what's being said here is that God is talking about people who haven't been saved yet. Right now there's just a small handful of Christians in Corinth—Paul, Silas, Timothy, Priscilla, Aquila, Gaius and his household, and that's it. God says, "I have much people in this

city.” It’s like, “Uh, excuse me, Lord, but I wonder. Do you know how to count here because there’s not too many people here right now.” I believe, along with a lot of good conservative New Testament scholars, that the Lord is talking here about people who are going to be saved. You say, “Well, why does He put it in the present tense? Because God is eternal. God dwells in the eternal. God knows who is going to be saved, and He can speak about them being saved before they’re even saved. He can actually say they’re My people before they’re actually His people. You say, “Run that by me again?” God is actually saying, “I have people that I’m going to save,” but He puts it in the present tense, “I have much people in this city.”

This supports what we know to be the doctrine of election. This is a mind-blowing theological truth that we can’t comprehend or fathom or understand—God, by His sovereign grace, chooses who will be saved. You say, “Well, wait a minute, Pastor Miller! Are you trying to tell me that God chooses some to go to heaven and some to go to hell?” No, I didn’t say that, but I did say that God saves us by His grace and that He sovereignly chooses before the foundations of the world who it is is going to be saved. At the same time, I do believe that men can resist God’s grace, that men are free to reject the gospel, thus are responsible for their own condemnation and damnation. I don’t believe that there are people chosen to go to hell.

There are people chosen to go to heaven, and the Bible is a whosoever gospel—whoever believes, whoever repents, whoever trusts in Jesus Christ can be saved. Whoever wants to believe, can believe. You say, “Well, I don’t get how that works. How can it be that God sovereignly chooses or elects some people, and you can reject it if you want. How does that work?” I don’t know, but I believe that both are taught in the Scriptures. I believe that they reconcile in a higher unity that God knows and God understands. If you try to figure it out, you’ll lose your mind. You say, “I’m about to lose my mind right now, Pastor Miller. It’s not only late Wednesday night, but you’re giving me a headache.” If you explain it away, you lose your salvation; so it’s best just to go, “I’m just glad I’m chosen.” Didn’t Jesus say, “You haven’t chosen Me, but I’ve chosen you?” You say, “Really. I chose to raise my hand and walked the aisle,” or “I got on my knees. I repented. I believed in Jesus Christ.” Yeah, but then to stop and think He chose you before the foundations of the world. I wouldn’t have chosen me, but He chose me. That’s an amazing thought, that God chose me by His grace. I do believe that’s what the Lord is inferring here when He says, “for I have much people in this city.”

The implication for evangelism, even though I believe the Bible teaches that God sovereignly chooses who will be saved, is that we don’t know who they are. Spurgeon used to say, “If they had a big yellow stripe down their back, I’d go around lifting people’s shirts up,” but we don’t know who they are so we preach a whosoever gospel. We tell everyone about Jesus, and we let God draw them to salvation. We go to everyone, everywhere and preach the good news that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” We don’t know who the elect are, so we preach the gospel to everyone, and we preach a whosoever gospel.

Paul had His presence, “I am with thee,” and I will protect you. I want to make a statement about that and then I’m going to wrap this up. That statement is: I will protect you. I want to

give you a little kind of understanding of how you interpret Scripture. That is a specific promise, for a specific person, at a specific time. You cannot make that an universal promise to all Christians at all times. You can't say when God spoke to Paul saying, "No one will hurt you," "I claim that for me." Maybe subjectively God will speak to your own heart through that statement, and give you a peace and an assurance that God's going to protect you, but it's not *carte blanche*. It's not guaranteed that nothing bad will ever happen to you. Even Paul himself was stoned, falsely accused, arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison; and Paul's going to be shipwrecked and bitten by a snake. He could say, "Lord, what happened to Your promise? The snake bit me. Can't You see this?" It was at that time and at that place God gave that man a specific promise. Whenever you read something in the Bible, you have to look at the context—who it's to, what are the conditions, what's the promise, is it universal? Is it taught other places in the Bible? In this case, it's a specific promise for Paul that at this time in Corinth God will protect and watch out for him.

That's my third thing that God did for Paul, (verses 12-17) God protected Paul. Let's read it. "And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia," southern Greece, that means he's the governor there, "the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat," that is, they brought him to the bema seat, "Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. 14 And when Paul was now about to open his mouth," and defend himself, "Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: 15 But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. 16 And he drave them from the judgment seat. 17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes," who is, by the way, mentioned in 1 Corinthians as well. If it's the same Sosthenes, we don't know, "the chief ruler of the synagogue," Gaius got saved so they had to get a new chief ruler of the synagogue, "and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things," so God delivered Paul.

I'm just going to give you my last point and read it. Then, I'm going to go back over it next week. In verses 18-22, God put a desire in Paul's heart for His will—to do and be obedient to God's will. That's how God kept Paul going. "And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while," Paul's waiting there in Corinth for a good time, "and then took his leave of the brethren," he's leaving them, "and sailed thence into Syria," that is, he's going to leave Corinth and go back home to Antioch of Syria. "...and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn," or shaved, "his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow." This had evidently been a Nazarite vow, something to do with his ministry there in Corinth; and after the period of time of the vow, he shaved now his head. "And he came to Ephesus, and left them there," he left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, "but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not," I want you to notice that. They wanted Paul to stay in Ephesus. He said no. "But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast," most likely the Passover, "that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you," here's the phrase I wanted to get to wrap it up, "if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. 22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up," that is, to Jerusalem, "and saluted the church, he went down to," his hometown of "Antioch," back where he started.

I won't go to the map. We'll do that next week. I went longer than I wanted to tonight. I didn't get to cover all the stuff I wanted to, but I finished reading my text. We're going to go back over it next week. Here are the four things God did to encourage Paul: 1) He sent him helpers. 2) He spoke to him directly. He came to him and encouraged him. He had the Word from the Lord, his personal encounter with God. 3) God protected him. God made a promise that I'll take care of you. He protected him. 4) God put a desire in Paul's heart (verse 21) to do God's will. He actually said, "No, I won't stay here in Ephesus. I gotta go first to Jerusalem, then back to Antioch, and, if God's willing, I'll be back." God was willing in Acts 19, and he comes back.

The point I want to make is: You know what keeps you going in times of discouragement? You know what keeps you going in times of opposition and persecution? Is the will of God. Amen? Is knowing this is God's will for my life, and I want to be obedient. I want to be faithful. I want to do God's will. I want to do what God's calling me to do because one day when I get to heaven, I want to hear the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," right? Are those the words you want to hear? Those are the words I want to hear. Amen? So let's not stop speaking. Let's not quit. Let's not give up. Let's get going because it's always too soon to quit. Amen?