

You are Invincible  
Acts 18:1-11

Ezekiel 33:1-11  
Romans 1  
Psalm 115:1-11

This morning we are going to be looking at the first half of chapter 18, Where we will find Paul now in Corinth after having spent some time in Athens which we looked at last week. Paul's response to the questioning of the philosophers in Athens sort of ends the chapter abruptly. Luke doesn't give much detail or reasons behind Paul leaving Athens as we have seen from previous accounts. There is mention of some who mocked him because of his teaching on Christ and the resurrection, but it also said that some believed. There isn't any mention of persecution, or any such thing but it seems that Paul did not stay long in Athens. So now we find him in Corinth

Corinth was one of the most important city centers of the Gentile world at the time which was located about 37 miles from Athens. It was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia since 27 BC. IT was located on an isthmus of Corinth, which is thin line of land that connects to larger land masses separating 2 bodies of water, one of the most known such isthmus is Panama, which connects north and south America. Because of its location, Corinth was very important to trade and commerce and in fact had a long standing rival with Athens. There were 2 sea ports located in Corinth, one was Lechaem being the gateway to the Adriatic sea, and the second Cenchreae which was the gateway to the Aegean sea. The City of Corinth was built on the north side of what is known as the Acrocorinthus, or also referred to as Upper Corinth, is a large monolithic rock formation that towered over the ancient city. There was a spring located there with a consistent fresh water supply and this was also the sight of the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess associated with love, lust, beauty and passion. And at the bottom of this Acrocorinthus, was the temple to Melicerties, the patron of seafarers.

Not unlike Athens, Corinth was devoted to the worship of many pagan gods, and this was linked with sexual immorality in a way that was infamous even in that ancient Greco-Roman world. Corinth was an important port city, and a stronghold and location of strategic importance. In 146 BC the ancient city was destroyed however by the Roman's because of the leading role its populace had taken in the rebellion of the Achaean League against Roman rule. Thus its population had been enslaved and its land claimed for the Roman state. The city of Corinth lay in ruin for many years until it was refounded by Julius Caesar in 44 BC. So the Corinth in which we find Paul at in our text this morning would have been relatively new and once again a prosperous city, in fact Corinth was the chief sponsor of the Isthmian Games, which were held both the year before, and after the Olympic games. This also was a big draw, bringing many people into this city. In many ways, Corinth was the center of influence for that entire region.

So it is here that we find Paul, in a large bustling city, given over to the worship of pagan Gods, and known for its sexual immorality. Some have likened it to our city of Vegas, but I think it was in many ways even more so, for the rampant immorality was not just merely for entertainment as it is in Vegas, but was infact a part of the worship of Aphrodite. So now that we have a picture of what this city was like at that time, let us read our passage this morning...chapter 18, starting in verse 1 and reading to verse 11.

As we see it is here that Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla, 2 other Christian Jews who had come from Rome after Claudius commanded that all Jews be expelled from Rome claiming that they were all trouble makers and constantly made disturbances within the province. There had seemed to be a contingent of Jewish activists who were rebellious against the Roman rule, thus all Jews were banned from the area. Many scholars believe that Aquila and Priscilla were already believing Christians, who had encountered the gospel in Rome. The context here suggests that Paul was seeking out some accommodation and work with fellow Jews and was blessed to find these 2 who were not only believers in Christ, but also fellow tent makers. Again we can see God's sovereign hand at work in the events that have taken place in peoples lives.

This event of banning Jews from Rome likely brought with it many hardships and trials, yet it is because of this that Aquilla and Pricilla were here in Corinth, a location that God had them to be not only to offer lodgings and hospitality to Paul on his eventual arrival, but also companionship in the gospel, and effective ministers. Paul worked his trade as a tent maker, and every sabbath went to the synagogue and sought to persuade the Greeks and the Jews that were there. Again we are seeing this trend of Pauls to minister at the synagogues first, and again we are seeing that there is a contingent of gentiles who have aligned themselves with the temple worship practices. It would seem that Paul was sort of easing into the ministry here at Corinth, having established himself a place to stay, and work his trade. As we see in verse 5, it says that when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the spirit to testify to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.

It would seem up to this point he was reasoning, or debating with them in their own understanding of the scriptures. Which was not outside of the normal practice of Jewish worship within the synagogue. But up until this point had not breached the subject of Christ crucified, and being the promised messiah in which this scriptures foretold. But now that his companions have come, Paul was encouraged by the spirit that now was the time to breach this subject, to share the gospel. Of course this too took on the same pattern as we have previously seen throughout Paul's ministry. When he would confront them with the truth that the one whom they crucified was indeed the promised Messiah, unsurprisingly they responded to him in anger. It says they opposed him and blasphemed. They mocked Paul, and in doing so were blaspheming God, this was not a mere disagreement, but rather a violent and angry reaction, tow which Paul responded it says by shaking his garments and claiming their blood is upon their own hands.

When Paul shook his garments, it was a symbolic gesture of being rid of them, being down with them, and being clean and innocent of their impending punishment. Paul in this statement indicates that he has done his duty, he has fulfilled his purpose in sharing the gospel of Christ, and warning them of the judgment to come, but in their rejection he says that he is innocent of their death, meaning their spiritual death, for he has given them the gospel, they are not ignorant of the truth, and now their own fates are in their own hands. Just as we read in Ezekiel this morning, Paul was the watchmen who warned of the coming day of the Lord, and all those who refuse to heed the warning of the watchmen their blood is upon their own heads. As a faithful messenger of the gospel, he would not be held responsible for the punishment of the ones who denied the gospel he proclaimed to them.

There blood was upon their own heads, they blasphemed against God and Paul shook them off and left them to their own death, proclaiming From now on I will go to the Gentiles. This brings to mind Paul's letter to the Roman's which we also read this morning. Verse 21 "Though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God. Nor were they thankful, but because futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man...who exchanged the Ruth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator. For this reason gave them up." What we see here with Paul is not much different, this is the proclamation that he is making to these at the synagogue. Their denial of Christ is death...they have chosen to not glorify God though know him. And Paul, having brought the message and the warning is innocent of their pending judgment.

He would no longer be bothered to plead and debate in an attempt to convince their hard hearts and closed minds, but rather left them to their own devices and destruction as he turned to the ministry of the gentiles. In some ways this is also a lesson to us who would minister the gospel. It is clear that not all who hear believe, and it is likewise clear not all who hear are accepting of even the concept and ideas of the gospel.. reacting rather in anger, being unable to hear, unable to listen. This is not something that we should be discouraged by, or take to heart, for it is not us to saves souls, but God. We are merely to be the messenger, the watchmen who proclaim the coming of the Lord, and for those who do not heed this word, their blood is upon their own heads, their lives and the consequences therefore are their own responsibility. We are not held accountable for those who fall away, we are not held accountable for those who reject Christ. I think sometimes in our ministering to others, we can beat ourselves up thinking...oh we should have said this, or we could have done more. But the reality is as long as we are faithful to proclaim Christ, it is not of us to convince, and convert...that is God's work, ours is but to minister and warn of the wrath to come.

So this is what Paul was symbolizing with the shaking of his clothes, he had done his part, he had shared the gospel and ministered the truth of God to them, put upon their rejection he was no longer obligated to try to win them over, having been warned of the judgment to come to all those who reject Christ, their unbelief was on them, Paul was free from obligation and guilt, and now will focus upon ministering to the Gentiles. So, he leaves the synagogue ministry behind in Corinth and goes and stays with Titius Justus, who's house was next door to the synagogue. This Gentile was likely one who would have been qualified as a God-fearer...a Gentile who worshiped in the synagogue, and therefore was likely a convert and a believer in Christ due to Paul's ministry in the synagogue. His willingness to allow Paul to use his house as a base for his outreach to the gentiles, right next door to the synagogue shows great courage and commitment to the ministry of Christ.

Think how upsetting that must have been for the leaders of the synagogue, to have this household right next door holding services with Gentiles worshipping the messiah that they rejected. Think of how infuriating that must have been, then, to top it all off...Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue came to believe on the Lord, he, and his household. I am sure that this likely intensified the opposition from the Jewish leadership, having one of their own leave and join this by their understanding and belief a seemingly blasphemous worship in the house of a gentile. Verse 8 says, that many Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized. This phrase is written in a continuing tense in the Greek, pointing to this being an ongoing process, despite the opposition of the synagogue, and the hardened hearts of the Jewish leaders, God was pleased to use Paul's ministry out of the house of this gentile believer in a powerful way throughout the city.

It is about this part in the narrative that we would expect an uprising from the Jewish leaders, and Paul once again being forced out of the city in which he was ministering...but that is not what we see happen here. Verse 9 says, "The Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, saying..Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you or hurt you, for I have many people in this city." While throughout this accounts that we have been reading in this book, we see that God has used persecution and the opposition to the gospel as a means to spread the gospel all across the world, and when this is now about the time here in Corinth that Paul would likely be leaving the city to flee the coming persecution, God tells him to stay for his work is not yet done here in this city. There are many yet who need to hear and many yet who will believe. Paul ended up staying in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching, and ministering the gospel, and he could do so with great confidence knowing that God had promised him that he was not in danger of harm, and that there were many yet who would come to faith.

I am sure that this was a great encouragement to Paul, and likely would have an effect on his ministry, to become even more bold in the outreach of both Jews and Gentiles. In his first letter to the Corinthians after he had left them, he gives a little insight at his first arrival to the city. Chapter 2, he says, "And I brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech, or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and much trembling, And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Paul came to them fearful, and trembling, which is completely understandable, thus far his ministry has been one fraught with persecution and trials. Being dragged before councils, being tossed into prison, being thrown out of cities, having men come from neighboring cities to incite riots in an attempt to have him branded as an insurrectionist against Rome. Everywhere Paul went he was greeted with opposition and violence. How could this not have the effect of causing fear and trembling knowing that it is only a matter of time before he would again face such an opposition...and maybe this time they might be successful in their schemes to silence him, or have him killed.

But he had the promise of God, that no harm would come to him, that though they may plot, though they may even drag him to the courts there is nothing that they can do to him for God has promised that no one will attack or hurt him. There are 2 things that I want to point out in these last few verses we are looking at this morning. Let us read them again, "Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; For I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." It would seem that Paul may have been having thoughts of quietly sneaking out of the city as he has in the past, or maybe for the very least to pull back a bit on ministering for it would seem God directly deals with that fear of opposition that likely Paul was feeling which he wrote about in his Letter to the Corinthians. For God commanded Paul, do not be silent...but with that command, came a promise...for I will protect you.

The first point I point I wanted to make here, is simply again, as we have seen throughout this entire book and is one of the themes we see week after week, it is God's sovereignty. Paul stayed a year and a half, because of God's promise to him. A God who is not in control of all things could not make such a promise Though his opposition may rage, and though they may plot and scheme it will come to nothing of God so chooses. And the reality is that though we may not have received such a vision from God in the night as Paul did, it is in many ways the same with us. Nothing will happen to God's children without his approval. And like Paul, this should bring great peace into your life. Think of the fears that we have, each and every day there are doubts, there are fears, things are uncertain. 4

But with God nothing is uncertain, and with God nothing will happen to us unless this God who loves us with an everlasting love, since before the foundation of the world...whose love was so great that he came in the form of man to die, so that we may believe...this is the God who is with you, this is the God who protects you, and this is the God who even if you do go through some trial, is there with you every step of the way...for he has allowed this trial, and yes though it may not seem like it...it is for our good. For scripture tells us, "We know that all things work for the good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose." This all should bring great comfort to each and every one of us, God has appointed even our time of death, and the means of that death. For all intents and purposes we are literally invincible until that time. We are creatures of fear and doubt, we may be afraid of dying in a car accident, or losing a love one, or losing our jobs, or friends, the list can go on and on...but none of that will happen unless God has ordained it, and if it does...know that God is a merciful and loving God and it is for his purpose. Is it not enough to rest in this God, we should lay all of our fears and anxieties at his feet, for he has already determined their outcomes.

Which brings me to the second point. God does not promise that there will not be such hardships. Though he promised Paul that they will not attack him and no harm will come to him, that does not mean they didn't try. There was still hardships, there was still threats, but they were nothing more than a bark coming from a toothless dog. For they may seem intimidating, they may have seemed scary, but God had already promised nothing would come of it. So again, just like this promise to Paul, it is with us. We are not going to escape hardships, or trials, or even persecution and eventually death, none of these things are escapable in this world. But none of them are outside of God's purpose and plan in your life. He has written your story, and it is for us to discover it as it unfolds, and we must have faith and believe that this God will not leave us nor forsake us as he has promised. Through all things, he is with us, he protects us, he guides us, we are not left alone in suffering but instead are comforted by the great comforter.

For in even the greatest fear that mankind faces, even in death...God has conquered it for you, he has taken the teeth out of it. As Paul wrote, to these very people he is now with here in Acts, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet the dead will be raised incorruptible. And we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall we be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. Oh death, where is your sting? Oh Hades, where is your victory?" .Death is swallowed up in victory, the death of God's children is victory, for he has overcome the sting of it, for as Paul continues to write, The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our lord Jesus Christ."

So the take away this morning, which I hope will serve to be a great encouragement to you, is that though God may allow you to suffer, and though God may even bring the greatest fear of all, death, in all of these things he is victorious, he is our protector, he is our comfort, he is our brother he is our friend, and king. With God for us, who can be against us? Through uncertain times, know that to God nothing is uncertain, rest in him, find your peace in him, for he is the only one who can give it, and he gives it abundantly to all those who seek after him.