

You are Forgiven  
Acts 18:12-18

1 Corinthians 13  
1 Peter 4  
Responsive Psalm 8

Before we dive into our text this morning, it is important to remember some of the things that we talked about last week since they come into play here in our text, mainly remembering God's promise to Paul, in verse 9 and 10, "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." Remember this was not a promise that there would not be opposition, or problems arising from the synagogue leaders in Corinth, God was just promising Paul that whatever their schemes may be would not amount to anything therefore be bold, for they will be unable to hurt you.

As we had mentioned last week, this is an important detail which differentiates this missionary visit into Corinth from the other cities that Paul had previously gone to. Each of those had ended in persecution, or at the very least a real and serious threat of it, to which it would become apparent to Paul that it was no longer safe for him to remain. But here in Corinth, it is Paul who eventually decides that it is his time to leave, not being chased out of the city, not having been beaten, thrown in jail, he remained until he likely felt he was no longer really needed, having established a solid foundation for a church that it was time to move on.

Last week also talked a bit about the history of Corinth, that at one point it was destroyed and taken over by Rome due to the threat of an insurrection against the Roman government, but now had been rebuilt and established as a city under Roman rule, and a main trade hub in the area. In our passage that we are looking at this morning there is a mention of the proconsul Gallio who would have been the Roman equivalent of our Mayors today. This Gallio was an interesting figure being one whose history is well recorded in secular accounts. His birth name, was Marcus Annaeus Novatus, and he was the oldest son of Seneca the orator and brother of the famous writer and philosopher also, known as Seneca. He was adopted by Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeanus, and under the rule of Claudius he became the proconsul of Achaia. The date of his time as a proconsul is well recorded as starting in May of AD 51, and ending by May or June of the following year due to health reasons.

I think these little details are an important part in scripture, they often can be details that are overlooked but the reality is such things ground the scripture in reality, these are not just mere stories, but are real accounts that have happened to real people who we can find records of in secular history. I think it is always helpful to take a moment to ground scripture in this way, often times we as Christians focus so much on the doctrinal, or theological aspect that we don't often think about the practicality of scripture. Even such little mentions of these men in power firmly sets this book as a historical account, giving a layer of proof in the legitimacy of these writings.

So keeping these things in mind, let us read our text this morning. Acts chapter 18, verse 12-18 We see this event take place, where Paul is once again brought by the leaders of the synagogue to a Roman court seeking to rid themselves of him. But as we have already mentioned, the outcome is going to be different this time for God had already told Paul no matter what the scheme it will come to nothing...and in fact in the account that we have here this morning it actually had the opposite effect, ending in the beating of the leader of the synagogue. In the end of that account in verse 17,

there is an interesting phrase that Luke wrote, he says, “ But Gallio took no notice of these things.” He allowed these Greeks to beat Sosthenes right there in the court before the judgment seat.

IF you remember from last week, the account of Aquilla and Pricilla, how they had previously fled from Rome likely due to being cast out by Claudius. Which is probably also likely playing into the account here with Gallio, these Greeks, and the Sosthenes the head of the synagogue. It would seem that the Jews were not a well liked, nor respected people in this region, their hatred for the Roman rule and the failed uprisings probably didn't help their cause at all. So we see in this account that there is no love of the Jewish leaders by Gallio, he was not likely a just and fair ruler who ruled against them as much as he had little to no respect for them and would not be bothered to wastes his time with their petty issues. We get a hint of this in his response to their complaint in verse 14, “If it were a matter of wrong doing or wicked crimes, o Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourself, for I do not want to be a judge of such matters.” in this statement he is being condescending, showing lack of care, or respect of telling them unless your accusations have bearing upon Roman rule and law I have no time for you.

The Jews in various cities throughout the empire were giving some jurisdiction over the members of their own community, but it was always subject to the over riding power of the Roman rule. IN this case with Paul it seems that they brought this leader of a troublesome new movement to the proconsul charging him with the offense of persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law....think on that a minute, we will come back to this...Paul, was teaching contrary to the law. It would seem here that the leaders of the Synagogue were appealing to the Roman proconsul to likely imprison or have Paul removed from the city, since they themselves would not have had such authority. Especially over Paul, who himself was a Roman Citizen. We see again God's sovereign hand at work. Gallio was only proconsul for 1 year and Paul was in Corinth for a year and a half, God's perfect timing had allowed there to be a man sitting as judge who would toss out the case levied against Paul.

I keep hammering this point week after week because I don't know if we always fully understand it...I know I don't, I think it is always good to take a moment to reflect upon God's sovereign work in the lives of his children. The reality is that it all has meaning, that is everything that is going on in your life. In our finite minds we are not able to see, or comprehend the bigger picture, but it should be a great comfort to us to know that God is absolutely in control. This reality should make us bold, should calm our anxieties and worries. As I said last week when we covered the first half of this chapter, God doesn't say that you won't have trials, tribulation and persecution...but he does say that he is there with you through it all, and it all serves a purpose for his glory. If we can but grasp an inclining of God's sovereignty in our own lives it should put our hearts at rest. What more could we want then to have the God who through all things exist be for us. He knows our hearts, he knows our pains, our struggles with sin, our failures and yet he loves us though we constantly fail him, though we do not love him as we ought.

As Jim has been teaching in his series on worship, this is the basis for our worship of him...that he loves us, though we fail him, that he forgives us, though we sin against him. And the reality of this truth is what drives our worship of him, the reality of this truth should drive a sense of praise in our daily life know that each and every day we do not measure up to the standard that is set before us, but Christ through his love does not hold us in account. In Christ there is no condemnation, there is no guilt, for the price of our sinfulness has been paid upon the cross, by the one who loved us before the foundation of the world. Christ loved you....in eternity past...let that sink in. Before the world was, before the stars were set in the sky, Christ knew you...and loved you.

I think of the account of Moses where he asks to see God's glory, and God hides him in the cleft of a rock, puts his hand over him and passes by only allowing Moses to see his back for the glory of God is an all consuming fire which would have consumed Moses. His love is the same, his sovereignty is the same, his grace is the same, and his mercy is the same

It is unfathomable to us, and if we were to see the full orb of his glory in his life we would be consumed in the fires of his glory. As the Psalmist wrote, "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward us. As far as the east is to the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Our sins, our transgressions toward God...are removed, each and every day we fall short, each and every day we fail...but if we are faithful to confess, God has removed our sins so far from us that they are not existent. We tend to live in our guilt, and our failures...we tend to beat ourselves up over them, with a sense of unworthiness, but we should not be doing so, for why should we live in guilt to which God does not count us guilty? Why should we beat ourselves up for failures that God does not hold against us? I am going to give you some bible verses here which talks about God and his forgiveness of sin...write them down, meditate upon these things...

Isaiah 43:25: I, yes, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sin. God blots out your transgressions...he forgives you of your sin...for his own sake, out of his own love and mercy toward you know that you are unable to meet his standard of requirements he has made it so that he may have communion with you through his own work.

Hebrews 8:12 "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sin no more." As Jim said, God knew what he was buying when he bought us..and he has chosen to be merciful toward our iniquities, so that we may have a relationship with him. And he has chosen to remember our sins no more, they are no longer being held against us, and likewise we to must live as those who have been forgiven. Letting go of the guilt, of the past, of our failures for Christ has forgiven, and has forgotten.

Micah 7:19 "He will again have compassion on us, he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast our sins into the depths of the sea. Christ has destroyed our iniquities, he has trampled them underfoot, crushed them, forgiven them...and cast them into the depths of the sea. Even yet today, there are sections of the sea that we have not been able to visit...they are unreachable, unattainable...and this is how far God has cast our sin from us. So we should live as those who have been justified, as those who have been forgiven.

1 John 1:7-9 "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemn to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. There is no condemnation, Christ does not condemn us for our sins, for they have been forgiven and forgotten. Then why should we condemn ourselves, or others for that matter? If God, the holy and just judge of mankind does not condemn you, then who are you oh Christian to condemn?"

Matthew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive others their trespasses your heavenly father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespass, neither will your father forgive you."

A person who is unwilling to forgive, is a person who does not have the forgiveness of God themselves, therefore they are unable and unwilling. IT is not their unwillingness that limits God on his ability to forgive them...it is the fact that they themselves do not believe and themselves do not have the forgiveness of God for their own sins, therefore they do not have the God given ability to forgive.

Yet there is a sense that even us Christians do the same, by not letting go of our own guilt and shame though God has forgiven and forgotten, we are living as though we have not been forgiven.. Though we have been forgiven, though God has cast our failure, our sin, and our iniquity into the farthest unreachable spaces and himself has remembered no more....we yet still may harbor that guilt and shame, beating ourselves up for something that God has forgiven and forgot. We must also be able to allow ourselves to be forgiven, or we deny the peace that is given and comes with the forgiveness of Christ.

We as Christians can have a tendency to carry the weight of our guilt around our own necks like a millstone...but God has removed that millstone, and to continue to live in guilt for our iniquities that have been forgiven and forgotten is to not fully embrace the mercy that has been given to us. In fact, even in the acceptance of the forgiveness in our sin, we sin against God by holding on to it. If God has forgotten..should we not also? And this brings me back to the point about the accusations being levied against Paul. Verse 13, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." Paul was preaching this message of grace, this message of mercy, this message of forgiveness...but the Jews held on to their guilt, they held onto the law which brings only death and were unable to grasp the mercy and grace of God. Seeing the law as a way to gain merit with a holy God....the law perfectly did what it was designed to to, to bring despair and hopelessness in all those who put themselves under it, its purpose was to show that we bring nothing to this equation, it is impossible for us to reach God, and it is by his grace and mercy alone that he fulfilled his redemptive plan so that we may be brought to him

1 Corinthians 13 that we read this morning is a picture of how God feels toward you, and it is therefore also how we to shall live. The greatest commandment among these is this, to love the lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul, and to love your neighbors as yourself. This is all tied into forgiveness, and relates to our relationship with God now under grace in the new covenant established by his blood. Even here, verse 5...reading from the NIV says, "Love does not dishonor others, it is no self-seeking, it is not angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." God who himself is love, keeps no records of wrongs, does not condemn us for our failures, our shortcomings, or even our sin for he has payed the price already. IF he were to condemn, if he were to remember and hold us account then his dying on the cross would have no meaning. You fellow Christian...are saved from your sin, which means you are saved from the condemnation of it, you are saved from the judgment of it, you are saved from the penalty of it, you are saved from the guilt and shame of it...for it God's eyes, it is though it has never been.

And it is with this love that we are to strive to live toward one another, preferring one another, sacrificing for one another, loving one another, forgiving, forgetting, and no harboring guilt or shame for God has already dealt with it. I think in this way, we here in this little gathering have over the years expressed such toward each other one way or another...but there is always more to improve, there is always more that can be done, for though by the standard of the world we may have succeed, our ultimate standard is Christ. Though it maybe impossible for us in this mortal flesh to ascend to such lofty heights as the love of God toward each other, that does not mean we do not strive to, and when we inevitably fail we still yet forgive, and we put that offense as far as the east is to the west, no longer harboring anger, or guilt, or keeping a record of the trespass.

And this goes within our own lives as well, not just in the church but in our own personal relationship with God. Are you harboring guilt for sins that God has forgiven? Are you yet casting judgment and holding offense for past trespasses that others have committed toward you, or trespasses that you yourself have committed, though God has forgiven you of far worse? These things ought not be, we who are the people of God are a people of grace not of law, we are a people of mercy not of condemnation, we are a people of love, not of guilt and shame. And that is the point of the love chapter we read this morning in 1 Corinthians. Paul is saying, you have all of these good works, you attempt to make yourself holy by law..but if you have not love it is empty, if you have not love the spirit of God does not dwell in you for God himself is Love so those who are indwelt by him have the love of God flowing through them, and therefore out of them.

God's people are a people who seek forgiveness, and seek to forgive. Who strive to live in love toward one another. This is why Peter wrote, "Above all things...this is paramount and most important, have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins." Love seeks forgiveness, love extends grace and mercy, God who has loved us since before the foundation of the world has loved us in this way....that he gave his only Son to die for us..and Christ is the measure, the pinnacle, the example of Christian love, his love is the love that we should strive for, a love that is sacrificial and willing to die for one another. We may not be called to physically die for one another, but we are called to die to ourselves and to hold preference for one another..do have the needs of each other out way our own. This is what Peter means, if we have this kind of love for one another, it covers a multitude of sins.

So my challenge to you this morning, is that the world, and yes even other believers who have bound themselves to a form of law...will look at your life as the Jewish leaders in Corinth did to Paul and say, you persuade others to worship God through grace, mercy and love and do not hold yourself, or others to law..but instead forgive, and forget, show grace and mercy and because of this may God be pleased to use it to save souls. May God use it to guard and protect us against causing offense toward one another, and may God be pleased to give us all a spirit of forgiveness and love.