Acts 18:1-23

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Preacher: James Lapping

[0:00] Good evening, my name is James and I'm on the staff team here at St. Silas and allow me to add my welcome to Rob and others. It's great to have you with us here this evening. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word. Please speak to us now this evening. Amen. If you've joined us for the very first time at St. Silas, a big welcome to you.
And in the evenings at St. Silas, we've been working our way through the book of Acts. And the book of Acts is sometimes called the book of the Acts of the Apostles, but it could just as well be called the book of the continuing Acts of the risen, ascended Lord Jesus by his spirit through his word in the world.
And we see this in the start of the book of Acts. So the book of Acts starts with the ascension of the Lord Jesus, where two angels appear to his disciples as they're watching Jesus ascend into heaven.
And they say, men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the sky? The same Jesus who's been taken away from you into heaven will come back in the same way that you have seen him go into heaven.
[1:17] And it starts with Jesus' ascension, but the book of Acts ends with Jesus' return. And now the eagle-eyed among you might say, but James, where does Jesus return at the end of the book of Acts?

And here is the surprise, is that the author, Luke, leaves the end of the book of Acts deliberately open-ended, because the work of Jesus in the world is still continuing.
And that's Luke's point, is that Jesus is still acting in the world today. And so as Christians, we live between these two appearances of the Lord Jesus.
And so at St. Silas, we make it our aim to be a proclaiming church, proclaiming that Jesus has come to take away the sin of the world, and proclaiming that Jesus will return.
But it may be that you might be listening tonight, and you are a bit skeptical about Jesus, and you're wondering how it is that you can come to know the Lord Jesus.
[2:25] And the answer is that you need to meet with God. You need Jesus to act in your life. You need to meet the Lord Jesus. But the answer is also that you need to be reasonably persuaded that the good news about Jesus is trustworthy and true.

And these two fit together not as puzzle pieces that make up a whole. And I know lots of us have been doing puzzles over lockdown, but rather as an overlay, 100% picture over one another.
To put it another way, it's not about putting something together 50-50, but it's about 100% of each of those ideas as needed.
And so the Christian life is both 100% Spirit-empowered, meeting with Jesus, but it is also 100% reasonable. And so the plan for this evening talk is to really try and unpack that idea as we look in Acts 18.
And we're going to consider three points there. We're going to consider partnership in gospel proclamation. And then we're going to look at persuasion in gospel proclamation.
[3:41] And then finally, providence in gospel proclamation. So partnership, persuasion, providence. Three points, beginning with P. I've done it. So our first point there, partnership in gospel proclamation.

A partnership in the gospel proclamation is really a key theme that runs throughout this chapter.
And we see it right at the start of the chapter in verse 2 with Paul's friendship with Aquila and Priscilla.
And then we see it in Paul's partnership with Silas and Timothy. And we see the partnership in that Paul meets Priscilla and Aquila and he presumably explains the gospel to them.

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And what do they do? By the end of the chapter, they are explaining the gospel to others, sharpening and encouraging them. And they are proclaiming the Lord Jesus.
And that's the normal pattern of the Christian life, is that the gospel is not like a diamond to be put in our box of special jewels and packed away in the cupboard and never to be looked at again and just kept there safely.
[4:46] But rather, the gospel is a hot potato that's to be passed on to others, proclaiming and explaining as soon as we receive it. But notice also that the partnership in the gospel means hard work and mutual support for one another.

So if you've closed your Bibles, just open them up again and just look down at verse 3 in our chapter. And because he was a tent maker, that's Paul, as they were, he stayed and he worked with them.
So Paul's working there hard. And then again we see it in verse 5. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, to testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.
And so when Paul arrives in Corinth, he knuckles down and he gets to hard work, literally as a tent maker. But when Silas and Timothy arrive, they recognize Paul's gift and ministry as a preacher. And so they take on that duty to work hard in providing for their little band. And they knuckle down to hard work so that Paul can do the hard work of preaching and teaching others.
[6:02] And so what we see here is the disciples working together as one for the benefit of gospel proclamation. And so a couple of years ago, I remember listening to a talk by a chap called David Cook, who's the principal of Sydney Missionary and Bible College.

And he was talking about what he looked for in his prospective students, in the students that came at the Bible College. And he looked for the thing that was the most important thing that would be an indicator of their sign of success in ministry life.
And what was it? It was simply their diligence and attention to how they set up the church chairs for Sunday services and for midweek chapel services.
A very dull task, not very glamorous, but that one that is done in partnership for the benefit of gospel proclamation. And I imagine, considering the gifts and abilities that Paul had as a trained speaker and learned person, being a tent maker by profession might have been a bit depressing.
No doubt he could have had many other jobs, a lot more glamorous. But he knuckles down to it and he does this job as a tent maker because he knows that that's the job that's going to help him proclaim the gospel.
[7:25] So let's try and apply this point. As we think about church and job, as we think about those, do we ask ourselves the question, am I hindering or helping gospel proclamation in what I do?

And so lots of us who come to St Silas in the evening service, we might be students and we're looking ahead to the next step about what job we might do. And the question to think there is, am I going to pick the job that honors me, that makes me seem more important, or am I going to pick the job that helps gospel proclamation?
And obviously what that looks like is going to look very different for lots of us, depending on our gifts and abilities, and where we find ourselves in life. And it might be that our job might help gospel proclamation by providing money for it.
It might be a very good job like that. Or it might help gospel proclamation in providing more time for us to help out in gospel proclamation and doing little jobs to do with that.
Or it might give us more opportunities to proclaim the gospel. And the final thing that we see in partnership in this section is that it's to do with hardship and suffering.
[8:48] Partnership in hardship and suffering. So notice in our passage, Priscilla and Aquila, they experience hardship not only from the authorities in verse 2.

So what do we read verse 2? Because Claudius, that's the Roman emperor, has expelled everyone, had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome.
But we also see it from the crowd or the mob in our chapter in verse 12. So just look down and read verse 12 again. While Gallio is pro-council of Accia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.
And then in verse 6, we read that Paul was opposed and abused. And as we go through hardship and opposition and suffering, partnership is important in providing support and encouragement for another one.

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And as we go through the hardships in life, we shouldn't be surprised by them, but they are part of the normal Christian experience. And the next thing that I thought it might be helpful for us to notice in this passage is persuasion in gospel proclamation.
[10:05] And I wonder if you could just scan through the passage I'm reading tonight and count how many times reason or persuade or teach or some other word like that is repeated in our passage.

And so one of the key things that we notice in this passage is that the gospel is reasonable and that the model that Paul gives us is one of reasoning, explaining, and persuading.
So one of the things that you may hear from parents say time to time, and I'm no parent so I'm speaking slightly out of ignorance here, is that they might say regarding their children, well, I'm going to leave them to make up their own minds about Jesus.
And that sounds very impressive and very noble and sensible. But at the same time they might try to reason with them and persuade them over what job to do or what university to do or who to date or something silly like drinking and driving which is actually quite serious or something like that.
But here we see Paul reasoning and persuading and teaching about the gospel. That's the thing that is the most important to be reasoned about in all contexts and every opportunity.
[11:30] And what is it that he's explaining or teaching? Well, throughout the book of Acts we get a number of summaries of what Paul is teaching but I thought I might go to Luke's statement of what Jesus says the gospel is right at the end of the gospel of Luke and remember Luke is the author of Acts in chapter 24 of Luke and verse 46.

I'll just read it for us. This is what is written that the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name in all nations beginning at Jerusalem.
And you are witnesses of these things. And that is the spirit-empowered gospel that Jesus instructs his disciples to proclaim.
It's got two parts. I wonder if you notice that there. Firstly, it tells us something about who Jesus is. That he is the Messiah. That he is God's savior.
That he is God's king who suffered and died and rose to life again for our sins. And then secondly, we notice it tells us something about how we should respond to the gospel.
[12:45] Namely, that we should repent. That we should turn from our sins and towards the forgiveness that Jesus offers. And sin, if I had to define it, is really an attitude of being unreasonable towards God as our creator.

And repentance is simply turning back to reason. Acknowledging that we have been sinful and unreasonable in rejecting our creator.
You see, sin at its heart is a departure from reason. God is reasonable and unbelief is always unreasonable. That is, it goes against the evidence of what we can see in the world around us and against clear thinking.
And we see this in our passage in the court drama that evolves in verses 12 to 16. You see, what happens is because Paul reasons with the Jews in Corinth, they oppose him.
And the charge that they bring against them before the civil authorities is that he has tried to persuade them about Jesus. So, just look down at verse 13.
[13:55] This man, they charged, is persuading people, the people, to worship God in ways contrary to the law. And that's the charge, trying to persuade people.

But look at what the proconsul, that's the judge, Galileo, says about this charge and about how they have brought it. Just read verse 14. So, just as Paul is about to speak, Galileo said to them, if you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you.
And what's he saying? He's saying that in bringing this charge of trying to persuade them of the truth about Jesus before civil authority, it's unreasonable and it's got no place there.
But notice also how the crowd and the mob and authorities are portrayed as unreasonable and sinful in this passage. You see, having been dismissed by Galileo, the crowd turns on their leader, Sosthenes, who has presumably, he's been the ringleader who's instigated the charges.
And what happens, just read verse 17. Then the crowd there, they turn on Sosthenes, the synagogue leader, and they beat him in front of the proconsul. But then notice how the proconsul, the civil authority, the judge, responds to seeing this man beaten at his feet.

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[15:22] And Galileo showed no concern whatsoever. Both of those responses are completely unreasonable. The crowd is fickle.

One minute they're supporting Sosthenes, and the next minute they're beating him. And the authorities are shown as completely discompassionate. All they care about is their own power. They don't care about whether a person gets beaten or not. And both of those are completely unreasonable behaviors. And I imagine that as we've watched the news and all the marches over the last couple of weeks, no matter what our view has been, we may have seen something, either from the crowd or from the civil authorities, that has seemed completely unreasonable.
And that is because, and that is, that unreasonableness comes from sin. And you see, the issue is that sin is unreasonable.
You and I both know this. We know this of how unreasonable it is. We've experienced the heartache of sin in lots of ways. We've had our lives hurt and affected by adultery or by betrayal or by theft or by someone lying to us or by someone we trusted turning against us.
[16:46] And at some point we might have found ourselves asking, why would someone do that? That just doesn't make any sense. And that is because sin is unreasonable.

And the world's response to that is, well, simply we just need to make people more educated and then they'll act reasonably. But all that we do then is we make more educated sinners who still sin for no rhyme or reason.
And so if there's to be any hope then we need to turn from our sin and turn back to God. So if you're listening here tonight as someone who's doubting your faith or you're looking into Christianity for the very first time, realize that it is reasonable.
The challenge for us is to take the claims of Jesus seriously and not dismiss them out of hand for investigating them fully. So if we are to believe the gospel then we need to investigate and believe the claims of Jesus as reasonable but we also need, and this is our next point, we need to meet with God, with the Lord Jesus and realize that he is in charge and that he does care for us.
And so we're looking at providence in gospel proclamation. and providence is simply an old-fashioned word that means God's in charge and that he'll look after you no matter what.
[18:20] We see God's providence in this passage in the vision that he gives Paul in verse 9 and 10. I'll just read it again for us. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, do not be afraid, keep on speaking, do not be silent for I am with you and no one is going to attack and harm you because I have many people in this city.

And then we see it in Paul's remarks as he departs Ephesus right at the end of our reading in verse 21. But as he left he promised, I will come back.
What? If it is God's will. So throughout Paul's missionary journey that he has been on, Paul has reasoned and he's persuaded with folk and he's taught the gospel.
But all the while he has known that God has been with him. And that God has been acting through him by his spirits for his glory. And so Paul has been resting entirely on God.
And then notice how Paul interprets that vision and how he responds to that vision of God's divine protection and care. Just look at what he does in verse 11.
[19:33] He says, so Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching the word of God. And so what does Paul do? He gets this vision and he immediately sets about working hard at proclaiming the truth, at teaching the word of God.

And so because God is working, Paul works too. And the vision really is the answer to the prayer of the disciples right at the start of the book of Acts in chapter 4, verse 29.
I'll just read it again for us. So 429. And this is what the disciples pray right at the start of the book of Acts. Now, Lord, consider the threats, that's the opposition they were facing, and enable your words, your servants, to speak your word with great boldness.
And that's exactly what we see Paul doing in Corinth, proclaiming the word of God with great boldness, because he knows that God is in charge and that God cares.
And it's also exactly what we see Paul doing in the very last verse of the book of Acts, in chapter 28, verse 31. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.
[20:55] And it's the thing that we have been called to do as Jesus continues to move in his world. by his spirit empowered word, to proclaim his word with all boldness.

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And I wonder if you're anything like me, you might fall into two mistakes here. The first one is that when I realize that God is in charge, I'm tempted to sit back and use that as an excuse to be fatalistic.
And I'll say something like, let go and let God and stuff will be okay. But what I see Paul doing here is working hard, persuading, reasoning.
Why? Because he knows God is at work and he knows that God is at charge and that God has given him gifts and that he is coming back and will ask him what he has done with those gifts that he's been entrusted with.
And the second mistake that I make is I might think that it's all about me and my efforts. And sometimes this comes out in surprising ways.
[22:02] So I might get very passionate about social action and I think I need to organize a march or something to make the world a better place and that will be a reasonable thing to do that will point people to Jesus.

And it's all on me and on my efforts. Or I might do the spiritual equivalent of that. I might look at the vision that Paul has and I think I might need that vision to be able to be a spirit empowered witness to the world.
And so I turn myself into a spiritual frenzy trying to work up God's spirit within me and in my life and so I can have visions just like Paul. And so I turn my salvation and my Christian life into a great burden of work of something that I have to do within myself.
But by contrast Paul's response is completely sane and reasonable. Notice he realizes that he is a sinner and that his salvation if it was up to him the weight of that would crush him.
And so what is he? He turns to God in repentance in trust and obedience and he sets about working hard and simply proclaiming the gospel, God's word to the world.
[23:24] And that's exactly what the author Luke wants us to understand because he interprets God's vision for us so that we don't have to get distracted by it and so there is no misunderstanding.

He tells us how we should understand that vision in Paul's response in verse 11. And so Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half teaching the word of God.
And that is what the Spirit-empowered Christian life is going to look like. Paul realizes that God is still on his throne and he does not need to be fearful and so he simply sets about proclaiming and teaching God's word.
Well, in conclusion, as we come into land, I hope you have found this passage really encouraging and liberating. You see, in it, what do we see? We see God calls you to give up relying on yourself, but rather to trust in his care and protection, his providence.
Remember that old-fashioned word, even though as a sinner we have all rejected him. But even though we are sinful, he calls us into partnership, both with one another, but also with him in this work of proclaiming his word and of teaching about the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.
[24:49] And then finally, he gives us gifts to help us in this, gifts of reasoning, of explaining, of persuading others of the truth of the gospel, both in how we live and what we do day by day, the little things, how we set about our daily jobs, but also in what we say towards others.

God-centered, it's all about meeting with God and knowing that he is in charge, working in our lives, but it's also about being in partnership with one another, working together as a team for the common good for gospel proclamation.
It's a wonderful passage, an enormously encouraging passage for us tonight. So I hope you've been encouraged. Let me pray for us as we finish. So Father, we thank you that you've called us into partnership to proclaim your gospel.
We thank you that you are in charge and that you're caring for us and that you know every struggle and strife that we go through.
And Father, we thank you that you've given us gifts and abilities with which we can persuade others of the truth of the gospel. Please help us to use those, whatever they may be, however insignificant we might think they are, for your praise and glory.
[26:20] In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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