

Acts 18:1-28 // Be Confident in the Gospel to Bear Fruit Even in Places Like Corinth

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[0 : 00] After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.

Paul went to see them, and because he was a tent maker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, Your blood be on your own heads. I am innocent of it. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titus Justice, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord. And many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

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.

[1 : 13] So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. While Galileo was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgments.

This man, they charged, is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law. Just as Paul was 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.

But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law, say to them after yourselves, I will not be judge of such things. So he drove them off. Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes, the synagogue leader, and beat him in front of the proconsul.

And Galileo showed no concern whatever. Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila.

Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at century because of a vow he had taken. They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

[2 : 20] When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, I will come back if it is God's will. Then he set sail from Ephesus. When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.

He was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the scriptures. He'd been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who, by grace, had believed, for he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the scriptures that Jesus was the

Messiah.

[3 : 27] Let's pray as we sit.

May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. Well, it's a great passage.

Lots of names. Lots of places. Lots of people. It's got geography and history. Lots to like. It's an exciting passage once we dig into it.

In some ways, as we look into it, we'll find that Paul is working away as he always does. On my sermon notes, which you've got on the sheet, you'll find that I've used the heading, Persuasion. We'll come back to that in a moment. Paul is persuading people, as he does in city after city. But there are particular emphases in this chapter that we need to look at this evening.

[4 : 37] There's partnership. We'll see that with all those splendid names of people. There's another difference. In previous chapters, we've seen Paul moving quite rapidly from place to place.

He gets driven out of Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea. But then it's different in Corinth. Although opposition to the gospel doesn't go away, for a brief period, there's an emphasis on protection.

Paul is actually protected in Corinth. So he remains in Corinth. That's persistence. So let's get into the text.

Starts in verse 1. After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. We've got a map. There we are. We can see him going. They're not very far apart.

It's perhaps a bit like moving from Edinburgh to Glasgow. We're moving from the philosophers of ancient Athens to New Corinth. Short distance in miles, but quite a long distance in styles, we might say.

[5 : 47] When he gets to Corinth, it's a relatively new city, built by Julius Caesar less than a century before. It's a port city.

It's immoral. It's large. It's about number 10 in the Roman Empire when it comes to city size. And I'm not going to say much about it because we spent a lot of time thinking about Corinth in a morning sermon series, I think it was, and in our growth groups.

But what is striking is that Paul arrives in Corinth on his own. I mean, Silas and Timothy, his great chums, are still in Macedonia up north.

Sort of 200 miles north. I don't know, somewhere just beyond Inverness, I suppose would be the equivalent. And they'd sent Paul to Athens on his own when everything blew up in Berea.

But God had everything in hand for Paul. Because in verse 2, we find that Paul met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome.

[7 : 05] Isn't that wonderful? Paul isn't on his own because he meets a Christian brother and sister. And amazingly, they're almost as well-traveled as Paul.

They come from Pontus, which is in Asia. It's actually on the north shore of Turkey, in modern terms. He'd been to Rome.

He'd been thrown out of Rome in about 49 or 50 AD by Claudius. Suetonius tells us this happened impulsore Christo, Christo possibly.

We don't know exactly what that means, but it seems quite likely that the Jews had stirred up trouble against the Christians. Aquila means eagle in Latin.

And I have this sort of picture of him as he moves across, soaring. You know, his name seems to describe his tendency of emotion, which is great. We'll see later on. This isn't the only time that Paul moves Pontus to Rome and now to Corinth.

[8 : 12] But what's interesting is that although it must have been frustrating for Priscilla and Aquila to be moved from Rome where they were settled, God used it for good to bring them to Corinth.

And Aquila and Priscilla and Paul became close. Because Paul went to see them, and because he was a tent maker, as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

They gave him hospitality. And doubtless they obtained the best theological training that anyone's ever received. So there's Paul and Aquila and Priscilla.

And Paul goes for his, I think we can say his usual strategy. Verse 4, every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

I'm picking out that word. There's lots of words we could use in this passage to describe Paul's activity. I put them on the sheet, preaching and testifying and teaching. But let's particularly think of

persuading tonight.

[9 : 22] And I'll tell you why later. And of course, while he was on the Sabbath in the synagogue, doing his teaching and persuading, during the week he had to work at his tent making.

But then, something even better happens for Paul. Not just his new friends, Aquila and Priscilla, but old ones turn up.

For in verse 5, when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching. We'll find a picture that will help us to see that.

There they are. I had to write some of it on by hand. But there they are. They're coming about 200 miles south to Corinth. So Paul, who'd started off on his own, doesn't remain that for long.

He's in partnership with others. This actually is the 13th and last of the references to Silas in the book of Acts. And we know that Silas at least stayed in Corinth for some time.

[10 : 32] Because he preached in Corinth. And he was a co-author of 1 and 2 Thessalonians that are written from Corinth. So he clearly spent a good time in Corinth with Paul.

And I think this passage illustrates the fact that Christian leadership isn't a solo activity. It's a team game. But there's something else that's exciting.

Not only do we have Silas and Timothy turning up, it seems that they brought a gift with them.

That's why once they arrived, Paul could devote himself exclusively to preaching.

He could stop tent making for a while and get on entirely with preaching. It seems likely that the gift came from the Philippian church.

So actually, partnership's even bigger. It's not just Paul, Aquila, Priscilla, Silas, Timothy. It's also the Philippian church or maybe other churches up in Macedonia who'd sent money.

[11 : 44] And that's interesting because self-supporting ministry is good. Tent making ministry, we call it. I think probably on the basis of this passage. Sometimes it's the only way into a country as a missionary.

Sometimes it avoids being a burden on a local church, on a fledgling church. But the normal pattern, Paul says that the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

So we have this wonderful picture of fellowship. Friendship, fellowship, and funds. All coming together in partnership. So, there's Paul with his team around him.

And he's devoting himself to preaching. He's testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. I think more literally it's the other way around. He testified that the Messiah was Jesus.

The Messiah for whom the Jews longed had actually come in Jesus. But although I'm talking tonight about Paul in a place where he gets protected, it's still difficult.

[13 : 01] In the synagogue, they opposed Paul and became abusive. He shook out his clothes in protest. He said to them, Your blood be on your own heads.

I'm innocent of it. From now on, I'll go to the Gentiles. What's the message there? He says, Well, I've been faithful as a watchman.

I've told you the gospel and you haven't listened. I'm not responsible to do more than that. I can't make you believe. I can only be faithful.

And he says, That's what I've done. So he leaves the synagogue and he goes next door to the house of Titius Justice, a worshiper of God.

It's a bit in your face, isn't it? He actually, the place he, one door shuts and literally the next door opens. And in he goes. And there he is.

[13 : 59] He's no longer preaching in the synagogue where he's not wanted, but he's preaching in Titius Justice's house. And even more extraordinarily, we discover that Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believe.

And many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. I wonder, I don't think we know anything more about Crispus. It was obviously exciting that the synagogue leader believed. Maybe he was someone that people would know. He's interesting in that respect. Maybe he became a church leader whose name would be public knowledge. And then, what's perhaps the most unexpected part of our whole passage tonight happens.

I mean, everywhere else, when we get to this point, Paul moves on. Well, he doesn't have a choice, really. Everywhere else he gets thrown out. And he's chucked out and he moves on to the next place.

But that doesn't happen in Corinth. Verse 9. One night, the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision. Do not be afraid.

[15:11] Keep on speaking. Don't 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.

We thought about partnership. And we'll come back to that. But now, there's this particular special theme here of protection.

The Lord says, I am with you. No one will harm you. And we'll come back to that. Moreover, the Lord is saying to Paul, there are people out there who will become part of God's family.

Paul's job is to preach and wait for them to respond. Paul opens his mouth and the Lord opens hearts.

So, the Lord says, stay. The Lord is sovereign and he's building his church even in Corinth.

[16:17] And if that can happen in Corinth, if the church can be built there, well, it can happen here.

It can happen anywhere. Corinth, that unlikely, godless place. Well, godless, at least in the sense that we would want it to be godly.

We've seen people become Christians. I'm not sure we can directly take these verses into us without cheating a bit. But it seems likely that God has many more people in Glasgow whom we've not yet seen.

I think we can at least say that God says to us, keep on speaking. Do not become silent. So, Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half teaching them the word of God.

Let's go back to what we've already thought about so far. Partnership with Aquila and Priscilla gives a place to stay.

[17:23] Partnership with Silas and Timothy gives friendship and brings a gift. Partnership with Titius Justice provides a house to meet in.

Then we have protection. God's promise. And that leads to Paul persisting.

So what about this promise of protection? We come to the story of Galio. While Galio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.

Oh dear. It must have seemed like Philippi and Thessalonica all over again. Again, Paul must have said, I'm under attack.

Will the Lord's promise be fulfilled? But let's see what happens. Paul never had to speak at all. It's quite rare for Paul to be silent, isn't it?

[18:30] But when it comes, just as Paul's about to defend himself as he tended to have to do in place after place, Galio said to the Jews, this was some misdemeanor that was within my remit.

Well, I'd listen to it. But as far as I'm concerned, it's just about names and words and the law. It's your problem. Sort it out.

Off you go. I'm not going to be involved in this one. We know quite a lot about Galio. For one thing, this is a point that absolutely fixes the historical dates for Acts.

we know from inscriptions that he was in Corinth from 51, mid-51 to mid-52 AD. So that's a very solid date for us.

He's a very important Roman. He's the philosopher Seneca's brother. And so, when he says that Christianity is essentially okay, well, that's going to stick for a little while.

[19:41] We know it doesn't stick for all that long. We know there's trouble coming under Nero. How much research he'd done into Christianity before he made his decision, and we don't know.

But either way, he's a reminder to us, I think, to pray for our government. We need to, it's helpful, we should pray that doors be kept open for us.

We can pray for the Galios. We even get to elect our Galios. So, we'll do our bit in the next couple of weeks. Not that our secular leaders are going to be perfect.

Galio wasn't perfect. After Galio had given his judgment, the crowd turned on Sosthenes, the synagogue leader, and beat him in front of the proconsul.

And Galio showed no concern whatever. So, he's not exactly a star, but, as far as Paul was concerned, he did his bit, and that was okay as far as kept, the Lord's promise was kept through Galio's actions.

[20:52] I don't know whether you remember, those of you who were studying 1 Corinthians, that when Paul comes to write to the church in Corinth, a short while after he's moved on, he writes 1

Corinthians, he addresses it from himself and Sosthenes.

Now, we've got no way of knowing that it's the same man, but it's at least possible that it might be the same Sosthenes who got beaten up in Corinth.

Maybe this chap who became the synagogue ruler after Christmas was converted may have received Christ himself and become a colleague of Paul's.

We don't know. It's just an interesting thought. But I missed something a second ago. I missed the particular charge that the Jews brought against Paul.

Their particular charge is in verse 13. This man is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law. I picked that because persuasion is what they accused Paul of.

[22 : 09] It's what back at the beginning of the story we heard that it was Luke's word that described what Paul was actually doing in the synagogue.

He was reasoning and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. And the Jews say the same thing. He's trying to persuade us. So that's what Paul does.

Seek to persuade. So verse 16 verse 18 Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Partnership and protection lead to persistence.

But after some time he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. It's not 100% clear as to why at that moment he decided to go.

It seems that he wanted to get back to Jerusalem and Antioch. the reason he needed to go to Jerusalem may be the vow he had taken. It appears to be a Nazarite vow.

[23 : 21] Maybe he was giving thanks for protection in Corinth. Or maybe he was praying for traveling mercies. Either way verse 18b before he sailed he had his hand hair cut off at Kenchari because of a vow he had taken.

I think the map will come up on the screen in a moment. Kenchari is just the eastern port for Corinth. There wasn't a canal in those days.

Although I think you could drag boats over the top if they were small enough. But that's the port. So that's where he's setting off from.

And then he's going to sail across to Ephesus and then later on he'll go to Caesarea and then that will take him to Jerusalem etc.

And then Paul leaves Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. Interestingly enough it's worth saying that that's what they're normally called in the Bible. The woman's name normally comes first on this occasion.

[24 : 30] Four out of six times. You'll find that that's the way round that it goes. And Paul goes into the synagogue in Ephesus.

Ephesus is a really big place. If Corinth was around number 10 in Roman Empire cities Ephesus might be number 4 Alexandria is number 2 Antioch is number 3 Ephesus is number 4.

These are all important places in the Roman Empire. So Paul goes into the synagogue in Ephesus and reasons with the Jews.

These ones ask him to spend more time with them. But he says no. I'll come back if it's God's will. I think probably he wanted to be in Jerusalem in time for Passover and the shipping lanes only open in early March and then it's quite a rush to get to Jerusalem in time for Passover.

Anyway he needs to get on and he gets to Caesarea and then he goes up to Jerusalem. The NIV is making the reasonable assumption that going up in the Greek means going up to Jerusalem.

[25 : 52] And then he goes down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And in the way that Paul's missionary journeys are normally looked at this is as it were the end of a whole journey.

He started from there in Acts 15. What we call his second missionary journey. He doesn't stay terribly long in Antioch because then he's going to start again on his third missionary journey.

But don't miss verse 23. It's one of my favorites. after spending some time in Antioch Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia strengthening all the disciples.

That map shows a series of possible places he may have gone through. Paul was of course a pioneer missionary.

He goes to places, he preaches the gospel, he starts a church. But he's not just that. He's also someone who goes back to churches and strengthens them.

[27 : 05] He makes them more secure, better established. And as a church we need to do both those things. We need to be both people who preach the gospel to new people and those who

strengthen those who have come to faith.

And that happens through the word of God. verse 11 said Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half teaching them the word of God. And finally we come to a little story just at the end of our passage.

One in which Paul himself is not directly involved at once. Meanwhile it says a Jew named Apollos a native of Alexandria.

That's why I thought it was fun to have city number two getting involved here comes to Ephesus. Alexandria on the Egyptian coast was a great source of learning.

It was where 250 years earlier the Old Testament was translated into Greek. I think it had the largest library in the world. And Apollos seems to be a really good example of an Alexandrian, doesn't he?

[28 : 20] he's learned, he has a thorough knowledge of the scriptures, he'd been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor.

He taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. There's some controversy in the commentaries about Apollos.

It seems strange as he taught about Jesus accurately, but didn't know about Christian baptism. Some people say, well, if he only knew John's baptism, then he must have known about repentance, but not about new life in the Spirit.

So he wasn't a Christian. Others disagree and say, well, Apollos is able to teach accurately, just not completely, and think that he's already a Christian.

He's quite different from the people in the next chapter who clearly weren't Christians. we don't know. I'm not going to answer that question any more than I answered the questions about Paul's vow.

[29 : 27] Because there is something very exciting about what happens when Apollos gets to Ephesus. Here's this man, he goes into the synagogue and he begins to preach boldly.

And Priscilla and Aquila hear him and invite him to their home and explain to him the way of God more adequately. Aren't they stars, these partners of Paul?

Don't you love them? They didn't confront him in public and say, you're not very sound, you haven't got it right. They invite him for a chat. They give hospitality to him.

They themselves have been taught by Paul in Corinth. And that wonderful year and a half when they'd been with Paul in Corinth. So it gave them all the knowledge they needed and all the confidence.

So they were able to sort him out, but they did it quietly. Maybe after you leave here, you'll find yourself somewhere where a gentle ministry of explaining God's way more accurately to someone will be very helpful.

[30 : 48] Maybe there's someone that you can be a Priscilla or Aquila to, gently but wisely explaining something. Think how God's plan worked out.

That sense of God's providence comes through the whole story. As I said earlier, they were brought from Rome to Corinth so they could meet Paul and help him.

Then they go on to Ephesus and they're just the right people to meet Apollos and sort him out. They have a church in their house and they send greetings to the Corinthians.

Later on, if we look through the letters, we'll find that they're back in Rome and have a church in their house. And later again, they're back in Ephesus. Aren't they wonderful?

And I don't know any churches dedicated to them. St. P and A, St. P and A, or whatever, P and A's perhaps? Priscilla and Aquila. Maybe there'll be one in Dalmarnock, who knows?

[31 : 55] Or maybe we have other more straightforward plans. St. Epaphroditus would be quite exciting. Let's wait and see. It's lucky it's not my decision, isn't it? So, there we are.

The sorted out Apollos is really just what's needed in Corinth. We see that when Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him, verse 27, and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him.

When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed, for he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents, proving from the scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

Messiah, this great Bible student, was just what they really needed in Corinth. Don't you see God's providence working out here too?

Apollos comes from Alexandria to Ephesus, meets just the right people in Priscilla and Aquila, goes on to Corinth where he's really needed, and he also carries on traveling.

[33 : 01] He was back in Ephesus when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Later on, he was with Titus in Crete. So what's the whole point? What we see in this chapter, with its geography and its history, is that the gospel continues to go out.

We've seen that in Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, now in Corinth. It goes out in power and is effective thanks to providence, persuasion, partnership and persistence.

I think we can say that there are places for us in mission. Maybe as we think of P&A;:, hospitality, gentle wisdom, friendship, like Silas and Timothy, money, like the Philippians, learning, being a great Bible student like Apollos, who is a great help to those who by grace had believed.

A lovely description of God's work, but also something important for Apollos to do as well.

We can pray for our secular leaders, for the Gallios of our world. We can reason, persuade, teach, strengthen like Paul, and we always depend on the providence of God.

[34 : 42] We can be confident in the gospel to bear fruit, even here. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this exciting story of the gospel growing excitingly in Corinth, but also of the way that your hand was on people, people who won't have known that at the time, but will have seen it later.

Working your purposes out, and now we pray that you'd help us to be faithful in persuading and persisting and praying and partnering.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.