

“DO NOT BE AFRAID; KEEP ON SPEAKING”

Acts 18:1-28

Key Verse: 18:9,10

“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.’”

Last week we learned that Paul’s message was simple and clear: Jesus is the Christ. The Christ suffered and died for our sins. God raised him from the dead to give us eternal life and the kingdom of God. To plant this message, Paul reasoned with people and explained and proved from the Scriptures that it was true. He also proclaimed the message boldly, especially the good news of Jesus’ resurrection. Paul spoke to all kinds of people in a way that each could understand. Jesus is the Christ! May God help us hold this message in our hearts and share it with the people of our time in a way they can understand.

In today’s passage Paul goes from Athens to Corinth. Again, he faces strong opposition and hardships. But the Risen Christ strengthens him to overcome fear and to keep on preaching the word of God for a year and a half. We learn that the Risen Christ was Paul’s power source. When we listen to the Risen Christ, we too can overcome hardship and discouragement and bear fruit to God in the end.

First, the tentmaker missionary lifestyle (1-4).

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, a city of over 500,000, the majority being slaves. It was a cosmopolitan city along the isthmus separating southern and northern Achaia. Trade flourished there. At the same time, it was a center for gross immorality, where the goddess Aphrodite was worshiped in ceremonies involving prostitutes. People in the Roman Empire used the word “corinthianized,” to describe one who had become totally useless due to sexual immorality.

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he was all alone, for Silas and Timothy had been left in Berea. Paul must have been lonely, like Dr. Paul Koh during the first year of Harper pioneering. It seems that Paul was also out of money. However, God was guiding his servant step by step. A Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla were in Corinth. They, together with all the other Jews in Rome, had been ordered to leave by Emperor Claudius. Paul went to see them. Look at verse 3. “...and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.” In this way, God provided new coworkers with whom Paul shared common life. God also provided a job with which Paul supported himself. Paul was a great servant of God and very intellectual. But he had a practical skill that enabled him to get a job in a foreign city. He was a tentmaker. In modern times, he might be a computer programmer, or a secretary, or manage a dry cleaning business. Dr. Isaac Baek is a nuclear engineer. But for some time he has been out of a job. So he has been doing “tentmaking” jobs like tutoring and so on. He has the image of St. Paul.

St. Paul worked hard to support himself and do God’s work at the same time. Look at verse 4. “Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.” While Paul worked as a tentmaker, he also taught the word of God in the synagogue to both Jews and Greeks. Paul, along with Priscilla and Aquila, are good examples of “tentmaker missionaries” who have influenced God’s work down through the generations. Many UBF missionaries have followed their example. Missionary Moody Kim studied law very well in Korea. Perhaps he could have obtained a seat on the Korean Supreme Court, where he would be highly respected and make lots of money. But he accepted God’s calling as a missionary to America. He has worked as a nurse and a computer programmer, while Missionary Helen, his wife, has been a babysitter, a beautician, and a factory worker. They have supported themselves and

God's ministry, and also given their hearts to teach the Bible to students at Northeastern, in spite of many rejections while fishing. As a fruit of their tentmaker missionary lives, God has raised Shepherd David and Maria Saethre as coworkers. The Saethre family, especially Nick—who is in elementary school—constantly prays for North America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

God has established UBF as a self-supporting, lay missionary movement. Tentmaker missionaries are the backbone of UBF. During his announcements at the 2001 International Bible Conference at ISU, Dr. Samuel Lee gave a clear direction for UBF to continue to be a self-supporting, lay missionary movement. To do so, each person must work hard to take up two crosses: the cross of self-support, and the cross of being a Bible teacher. This is quite contrary to the easygoing lifestyle that is so prevalent in the United States. Shepherd Steve Stasinos is tall, handsome and artistic. But at one time, he was easygoing and dangerous. Then he heard Jesus' word, "I am the way" (Jn 14:6). He accepted Jesus as his Christ and the only way of salvation. He struggled to learn hardworking spirit and began to use his great ability to share the gospel with others. By God's grace, he married Shepherdess Amy, a beautiful woman of God, and a fully licensed pharmacist. He could have depended on her to support his family. But he did not. To learn the tentmaker missionary lifestyle, he works hard as an engineer, and, at the same time, cares for the thirsty sheep God has given him. Sometimes his sheep call him repeatedly at work, and he must help them despite the inconvenience. This is basic training for any self-supporting missionary. We only thank God for Missionary John Peace. His example is a great encouragement to all American shepherds in Chicago. We also thank God for Dr. Nathan Walker, who prays to go to Russia as a self-supporting medical missionary in God's time.

Second, "I have many people in this city" (5-17).

After some time, Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth. Then "Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ" (5). When Paul had the opportunity, he gave his full attention to preparing and delivering gospel messages. Paul's point was that Jesus is the Christ. The Christ is God's anointed King. He suffered on the cross and died for our sins, shedding his blood. As his blood poured down, Jesus prayed from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a). Jesus died for our sins. Jesus prayed for our forgiveness. This forgiveness is given freely to those who accept it by faith. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. God demonstrated his almighty power and opened the way to the kingdom of God for man (Lk 23:43). Now we can have a relationship with the living God by the work of the Holy Spirit. We can see the kingdom of God, which is forever. Someday we will leave this world to enter everlasting glory with Jesus, where there is perfect love, joy and peace. All evil and unrighteousness will be destroyed (1Co 15:24). God will reign in every heart, and in every corner of his creation; and God will be honored as God (Php 2:11). Jesus, the Christ, is God's King, who will accomplish this for the glory of God. Praise God! Paul preached this message to the Jews.

The Jews were best equipped to understand and accept the message. But they did not. Instead, they opposed Paul and became abusive. Perhaps they threw eggs at him as he was walking to and from the synagogue. What did Paul do? He shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (6). Paul accepted their rejection as God's guidance to serve the Gentiles. This was God's will; God had made him a light to the Gentiles (13:47).

So Paul left the synagogue. But he did not go far. He went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God (7). Apparently, this became the location of the Christian church in Corinth. Look at

verse 8. "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized." It was a great work of God that the synagogue ruler was converted. And when he was converted, his household and many other Corinthians were converted. The Christian church at Corinth was beginning to grow, right next door to the synagogue. We can imagine how Paul must have suffered in this situation.

Look at verses 9-10. "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.'" Paul seemed to be doing very well. Yet the Lord encouraged him in a vision. Let's think about why and how.

In the first place, the Lord said, "Do not be afraid." Paul was a mighty warrior of faith. In Lystra, he was stoned and left for dead. Then the Lord helped him to get up and go back into the city (Ac 14:20). In Philippi, he sang and prayed in the jail right after being beaten and severely flogged (Ac 16:25). In Thessalonica, he bravely preached the gospel to gangster-like opponents (Ac 17:3). To us, Paul looks courageous and undaunted. Nobody would think that Paul was fearful. But the Lord saw his inner heart, and there was fear. Paul might have been tired of constant abuse. Perhaps he began to have bad dreams, maybe insomnia. The Lord spoke to his heart, "Do not be afraid." The Lord was like a loving mother who comforts her child in the middle of the night. The love of God melted all fear from Paul's heart (1Jn 4:18).

In the second place, the Lord said, "...keep on speaking, do not be silent." It seems that Paul had considered not speaking anymore—giving up his preaching ministry. But the Lord said, "...keep on speaking, do not be silent." How much more do we lesser ones feel like not speaking when we are discouraged. In the course of carrying out one-to-one Bible study, many unexpected things happen. Sometimes we prepare well and give all our hearts to plant one word of God in our sheep, but they respond with indifference or criticism. Sometimes our Bible teaching is not focused clearly on Jesus and we do not glorify God. Then, we weak human beings feel a sense of failure. We want to give up. But the Lord says, "...keep on speaking, do not be silent." May the Lord encourage you to keep on speaking his word.

In the third place, the Lord said, "For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you...." During his journey, Paul had experienced the same result repeatedly. After initial success in preaching, he had to face strong opposition, then persecution and rejection. It happened everytime. Now the Corinthians had begun to believe. Paul could expect persecution and rejection. Angry faces of enemies might have come before his mind's eye, one by one. But the Lord spoke to his heart, "I am with you." Jesus is Almighty God. Jesus is a mighty rock of salvation. Jesus is the Sovereign Ruler of history. When Jesus was with Paul, he could feel safe and secure, even in the midst of enemies.

In the fourth place, "...because I have many people in this city." The Risen Christ, working ahead of Paul, had a great harvest planned in Corinth. Paul was on the verge of being used greatly. But he might have felt like a woman who had carried a baby full term, and then had no strength to push for delivery. At that time, the Risen Christ encouraged him to see his vision. The Risen Christ had many people in Corinth. Gospel ministry would be exceedingly fruitful. Strengthened by this vision, Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching the word of God boldly. The Risen Christ empowers his servants to finish to the end. When discouraged, we must come to the Risen Christ for his word.

Of course, the opposition was still there. The Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. They charged him with holding illegal worship services. However, Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, completely dismissed their charges. Gallio paid no attention to them at all, though they began to beat Sosthenes in front of him. In this way, God protected Paul and made gospel preaching possible in Corinth. God is the Sovereign Ruler of man and the world. When God is for us, no one can stand against us. Our coworkers in Russia have recently experienced God's favor and protection. Our coworkers at IIT have also experienced God's favor and protection in the midst of opposition.

Third, the house church of Priscilla and Aquila (18-28).

After staying in Corinth for some time, Paul left for Syria and his home church in Antioch. Priscilla and Aquila went with him. They did not live as Christian yuppies. They moved with Paul to a new mission field. Obviously, Christ was Lord of their family. When they reached Ephesus, Paul preached the gospel there. His message was well received; people asked him to stay longer. It was a promising mission field. But Paul left, saying, "I will come back if it is God's will." He learned from the "closed door" training he received at the beginning of his journey. Now, he was very sensitive toward the leading of the Holy Spirit. He entrusted the mission at Ephesus to Priscilla and Aquila. Then he went to Caesarea, up to Jerusalem to greet the church, and finally returned to Antioch. Thus ends his second mission journey.

Look at verse 23. "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." This is the beginning of Paul's third mission journey. The character of his ministry is changing. On the second journey, his work was evangelistic in nature, proclaiming the gospel to those who had not heard. He begins his third journey by strengthening the disciples who had accepted the gospel in the places he had visited. Paul began to concentrate on raising disciples and would do so throughout the remainder of his ministry.

In verses 24-28, we catch a glimpse of the beautiful house church of tentmaker missionaries Priscilla and Aquila. There was a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. Apollos was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He was not dry and dispassionate; he spoke with great fervor. However, his understanding of the gospel was incomplete. He knew the message of repentance very well, but he did not know the grace of Jesus, or the work of the Holy Spirit. When Priscilla and Aquila heard his message, they realized what his problem was immediately. Yet they did not look down on him. They saw this as an opportunity to raise a great gospel worker, like St. Paul. They humbly invited Apollos to their home. Priscilla must have cooked a delicious dinner. Then, with respect and understanding, they explained the way of God more adequately (26). Probably, they helped him to accept Jesus in his heart as his personal Lord and Savior. After that Apollos focused his message on the main point of the Scriptures: Jesus is the Christ. In this way, Apollos became a useful man to God. It was the fruit of one-to-one Bible study in Priscilla and Aquila's house church. These kinds of house churches have produced many great men of God in history. We pray for Nick and Jessica in WIU, and for our brothers and sisters in Africa to establish beautiful house churches like Priscilla and Aquila.

In this passage we learn that the Risen Christ was Paul's power source to pioneer Corinth. When Paul was fearful and discouraged inwardly, the Risen Christ said to him, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking." Then Paul could finish with great victory. Let's come to the Risen Christ, who says to each of us, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking."