

# Facing Fear

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Acts 18:1-17

## Prayer

- thank you for your presence
- thank you for your Word, that you speak to us, and meet us
- these old stories are not just stories, but Spirit Breathed, and so give life and direction and comfort to us today

## Intro

- *God has something to say to fearful, discouraged, even deeply depressed people this morning*

*\*before we get to that critical moment in Paul's life, let's see what led up to it:*

**Verse 1 "After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth"**

## Corinth

- **map**
- **1) A Major City**
  - was rebuilt with splendor by Julius Caesar in 46BC
  - was strategically located with two ports
  - very **wealthy**, important economic center
  - hosted world famous Isthmian Games every other year
  - it was even the **capital** of the province, rather than the nearby Athens
  - like Athens, it was also full of **highly educated** and intellectual people as well
- this was a great city, with many so called "great people" in it

- we know that most of the great people of the city rejected the gospel
- “...not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” 1 Corinthians 1:26

## • **2) Infamously Immoral**

- as with many great cities, this city was well known for sexual depravity
  - behind the city stood a 2,000 foot mountain called the *Acrocorinth*, and atop this was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love
  - this temple had over 1,000 female slaves that served as temple prostitutes, and they would roam the streets of Corinth every night
  - also in Paul’s letters we find the church was actually boasting of a man’s sexual immorality

**Verse 2-4 “And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went on to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks”**

- **here we meet a couple - Pricilla and Aquila**
  - become good friends with Paul
  - lived in Rome, yet because of some form of persecution they left Rome
- **we also get a glimpse into the work habits of Paul**
  - he worked with his hands as a tentmaker, along with his near full time ministry work
  - Paul models for us hard work here
    - working a regular job during the week
    - and then goes and preaches and teaches on the Sabbath

**Verse 5 “When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the Word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his**

**garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles’”**

- *perhaps a clearer translation of this verse is in the NASB*
- **“But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ” NASB**
  - this is because, as we learn in Philippians 4, Silas and Timothy bring with them a financial gift from the Philippian church
  - and so Paul is able to preach full time, “devoting himself completely to the word”

*\*and yet, look at the fruit of this full time ministry:*

**Verse 6 “And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles’”**

- **first of all, how discouraging: his full time efforts are rejected**
  - **side note: you may be tempted to think, if you only had more time, you could be more useful to God**
    - if I could only be in full time ministry, I could be more useful to God
    - Paul is firsthand proof, that this is not true!
    - God is able to use you just where you are, in your work, at your home, with the limited resources and time that you have
- **second, it’s easy to gloss over what Paul says to them**
  - “oh yea, that’s just Paul being Paul”
  - but notice what he actually says
  - “your blood be on your own heads, I am innocent”
- **Paul is referencing God’s instructions to the prophet Ezekiel here**
  - Ezekiel was sent by God to warn the people of Israel of coming judgment for their sin
    - if he doesn’t warn them, they will be punished for their sin, but their blood will be on Ezekiel’s head - he didn’t warn them
    - if he does warn them, and they don’t listen, they will be punished for their sin, but their blood is no longer on Ezekiel’s head, he is innocent
  - and since the Jews reject the message of the gospel, Paul says “Your blood is on your own heads now, I’m innocent”

*\*now, we need to hear this:*

- **when we refuse to share the gospel where God has given us opportunity, we will have blood on our heads**
  - when we do not share, people may perish eternally for their own sin, but their blood will be on our heads
  - biblical reasoning, gnarly, but proper motivation for mission
- **I want to undo the pressure for you, for myself**
  - but this is the real deal
  - this is what we are really called to
  - this is who we really are
  - not just for Paul
  - this is what those who follow Jesus are really about

*\*so Paul here makes a conscious shift to the Gentiles*

**Verse 7-8 “And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.**

- we see God vindicate Paul’s move to the Gentiles
  - this is the sad pattern of the New Testament
    - God goes first to his chosen people, the Jews, and most reject him
    - and this leads to a focus shift to the Gentiles, the non-Jews
    - and then as many Gentiles turn to God, some of the Jews come as well
- and so as Paul turns to the Gentiles,
  - ironically, the first convert is the Jewish ruler of the synagogue, and his entire house
  - and then many of the Corinthian citizens believe and are baptized
  - and the Corinthian Church is born

*\*and it’s here in this shift, that we get a glimpse into Paul’s fear*

**Verse 9-10 “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people’”**

- **we’ve been following Paul on his missionary adventures the past few chapters**
  - we’ve seen him rejected by entire groups of people and cities
  - we’ve seen him nearly beaten to death
  - we’ve seen him face powers of darkness and drive out demons
- **and yet for the first time, we see Paul facing real fear and discouragement**
  - **Paul later speaks about this visit in his letter to the church here, when he says:**
    - **“I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling” 1 Corinthians 2:3 (NIV)**
    - we begin to understand some of the human barriers facing Paul as he approached this great city
    - we begin to understand how easily he could be tempted to wonder
    - *what is the gospel against the wisdom and might of this world?*
    - *what is the word of God when compared to all the pleasures this world has to offer?*
- it’s easy to think that spiritual leaders such as Paul are somehow superhuman, that they don’t face discouragement and fear.
  - let me state something that should be obvious, and yet we often forget

- **the people of God face fear and discouragement**

- **Jeremiah** - “Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.” Jeremiah 1:6-8
- **Ezekiel** - “And he said to me, “Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, be not afraid of

them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.” And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house. Ezekiel 2:3-7

- **Elijah** - “Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” 1 Kings 19:3-4

- **fear isn’t ok, it’s sin.**

- but fear is normal, it is part of the struggle to follow Jesus in this broken and oppressed world

- **we all face many types of fear**

- fear of man, what will people think
- fear of failure
- fear of the future

- **the worst kind of fear is the king that gets us off mission.**

- this is Satan’s chief purpose with our fear
- to get us to cease speaking God’s truth to the world
  - what a clever tactic
  - the very thing people need most - to hear the good news that God loves them and sent his son for them...
  - ...is what our enemy keeps us from speaking, in fear

## **God’s Encouragement for the Fearful**

### **1) “Do not be afraid”**

- Paul begins to waver
  - even Paul, who knew that God was able to do all things

- Paul in this moment is a testimony that what we know in our heads often doesn't translate to our hearts
- there are moments when we are tempted to disbelieve what we know to be true
- when our emotions become reality to us

- he was bold
- feared what would happen?
- feared the suffering that would accompany success as it so often had?
- feared what he already faced - beating, imprisonment, rejection
  - wearing on Paul?
- where, whom are you afraid of?

## 2) "go on speaking and do not be silent"

- where are you being silent?
- gosh, so many places
- **Verse 11 "And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them"**
  - one of the longest stays
  - longest letters
  - Paul even leaves well, not beaten or attacked or driven out, but on his own accord

## 3) "I am with you"

- do you know that God is with you?
  - Aslan
- the greatest way to face your fear is to turn your face towards God
  - the fear of the Lord drives out our fears of everything lesser
  - what if what you fear is afraid of Jesus

- we are slaves to our fears, when our fears are larger than our God
- “God is really not able to handle this problem”
- “For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again” 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

### God is working all things for your good

- “...no one will attack you to harm you...”
  - kinda funny, for 2 verses later it reads “...the Jews made a united attack on Paul...”
  - similar to “not a hair of your head will perish”
- **first** - was a specific verse, for a specific scenario
  - **Verse 17 “...But Gallio paid no attention to any of this”**
    - God’s radical provision, “king’s heart like water in the hands of the Lord”
    - God is still protecting much of his church, and still sending out the gospel
- **second** - true, when understood properly, like other verses about us not suffering
  - eternity in view
  - we won’t be touched, harmed, in any significant and eternal way
  - it’s worth it
  - we’ll be ok
  - “no fool to lose what he cannot keep to”

### 4) “I have many in this city who are my people”

- biblical predestination
  - God set them apart before they were born
- they are already his - not dependent upon their response - it’s as good as done
  - radical confidence!
    - “This conviction is the greatest of all encouragement to an evangelist” (Stott 298)
    - some may reject
    - but some won’t!



- they already belong to the Lord!
- **there are many in our cities who are God's people**

## **Fly Fishing**

- too hard
- too discouraging
- breaking lines, stuck in everything
- there's no fish
- they don't exist
  - stood still - they were everywhere
  - they do exist
  - they do like to eat
  - you can catch fish
- as certain as there are trout, and they can be caught
  - there are more in this city, in your life who already belong to the Lord
- **Tackle Dan the evangelist**
  - Remember, it's not just about catching fish, it's about being a fisher of men

## **Verse 11 "And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them"**

- Paul having been strengthened, encouraged by the promises and presence of God, remains a year and six months
- and not to put down any good work a Christian and a missionary could do in a city, but notice the one thing Paul puts his focus on - teaching the word of God
  - if you feel called to be a missionary, your first and primary calling is to teach the word of God
  - we are Bible people - Christians are
  - did you know this is our first priority - to know and to speak the Word of God
    - this is because there is power in the Word

- there is no other book or act that can do what God's word can do

*\*now, Paul's stay in Corinth closes in an interesting way*

**Verse 12-17 “But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, ‘This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law’ But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, ‘If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.’ And he drove them from the tribunal. And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this”**

- **God keeps his promise to Paul**

- Paul didn't even get an opportunity to defend himself
- God was with him, God was fighting for him, and delivered him

- furthermore, Gallio set legal Roman precedent in favor of the gospel in this moment

- this was huge - God was laying foundations for the spread of the gospel for hundreds of years to come

- **God fights for us**

- God delivers us from what we fear
  - whatever it was Paul feared - did not happen
  - not only that - God used a Roman official to set legal protection for Paul and the gospel!
  - how's that for God fighting for Paul!

- **fear is often of something that doesn't even exist, but rather of some potential worst case scenario**

- fear is often an imaginary monster - and God is fully able to deliver us from it
- don't worry about tomorrow - God's got you
  - God fights for us

## **Call to Worship / Practice for Daily Life**

### **1) Deal with our fear**

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- **the cross - nothing to fear**
  - forgiven

### **2) Repent of our silence**

- where am I being silent where I know I should speak up?
- who have I still not yet shared Jesus with?
- **the cross - forgiven, like Peter**
  - also like Peter, grace empowers us to speak
  - filled with the Spirit, boldness, not fear - to speak

### **3) Be refreshed in the presence of God**

- Jesus is not weary, but brings rest & strength
  - "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint" Isaiah 40:28-31
- **the cross - Jesus has done the work, has made a way for you to be in his presence**

#### **4) Be confident that Jesus is building his church**

- “I will be exalted” Psalm 46