

## DO NOT BE AFRAID; KEEP ON SPEAKING

Acts 18:1-28

Key Verses: 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.”*

In today's passage, Paul goes to Corinth to preach the gospel. He faces strong opposition and hardships. He was discouraged. But the Risen Christ strengthens him to overcome fear and to keep on preaching the word of God. May the Lord help us to listen to Jesus so that we too can overcome discouragement and bear spiritual fruit in him!

### I. COWORKERS IN CHRIST ARE PRECIOUS (1-4)

At that time Corinth was the largest city in Greece with a population of more than a half million. It was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. Due to its strategic location, the city was bustling with commercial activities and prosperity. It was also notorious for its moral and religious corruptions. The goddess Aphrodite was worshiped in ceremonies involving prostitutes. There were many pagan temples that hired a thousand prostitutes. The city was so notorious for its immorality that a new word was coined: To “corinthianize” meant to live an immoral life.

It was Paul's first time in the city. He did not know anyone. He was all alone, because Silas and Timothy had been left behind in Berea. He didn't have a place to stay, and he did not have any money. How could he survive, let alone preach the gospel there? Luke says in verse 2 that he met a Jew named Aquila there. It sounds like he got lucky to meet a fellow Jew. I believe that it was God who led Paul to meet his precious mission coworkers in a way he did not expect. God was leading his servant step by step in doing his work. Look at verses 2-3. *“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 tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.”* It was no coincidence that Paul met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth. God put them together. They even had the same job skills as tent makers. Paul stayed and worked with them. Just like that, Paul's room and board issue was solved. More importantly, he gained faithful coworkers in Christ. Together they worked hard to earn a living as self-supporting missionaries. They also worked hard to preach the gospel, which was their calling from God. Verse 4 says: *“Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.”*

Over the years, God also encouraged us by sending mission coworkers to Shippensburg. We know that new missionaries join the ministries in big cities such as Washington, New York and Los Angeles for various reasons. Shippensburg does not have many things to attract them. Amazingly, God sent M. Caleb and Pauline Lee, Dr. David and Pauline Hwang, and M. Victor and Thelma Edun here to serve the Lord together. Like Nathanael who asked “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”

(Jn 1:46), people may ask, “Shippensburg! Can anything good happen there?” But good things are happening here, simply because the good news of Jesus Christ is preached here. Amen! And just like Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, we are tent-maker missionaries. M. Caleb is a software engineer. His days at work can be long and tedious. People in that position come home tired and try to unwind by taking it easy. But he has to bear another cross, that is, to pray for the young people and prepare Bible study materials for them. Dr. David really wanted to be in Toledo, but in his providence, God led him here! I believe that it was God who chose him to get the faculty position here, beating out the other 49 candidates. Now he is a tenured professor shepherd. How about M. Victor Edun? Who would have said that a missionary would come to Shippensburg all the way from Nigeria? By God’s guidance, he is now a tenure-track professor at HCC. Along with our precious women coworkers, we are all self-supporting missionaries. We work hard to earn a living, and, at the same time, care for young people in the name of Jesus. This is not easy. But praise God for putting us together here as coworkers in Christ! What a privilege to serve the work of God together! What a blessing to live as gospel workers, a position that even angels are envious of! Let us thank God and work together for the Lord as Paul, Priscilla and Aquila did!

## II. KEEP ON SPEAKING; DO NOT BE SILENT (5-17)

Look at verse 5. *When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.* Paul was encouraged also by the arrival of Silas and Timothy. They brought financial help offered by the Philippian church in Macedonia (Php 4:15). So Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching. Tent-making was not his purpose in life. His goal in life was to preach the gospel. What was his message to the Jews in Corinth? He testified that Jesus was the Messiah. In Athens, Paul had reasoned with the people there, quoting their philosophers to get their attention. In Corinth, however, he resolved to know and preach only Jesus Christ who was crucified (1Co 2:2). Why? Paul really loved his fellow Jews. He really wanted them to know who Jesus is. Why is it important for us to preach that Jesus is the Messiah? It is because our personal salvation depends on knowing this Jesus. Jesus died on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. As his blood poured down, Jesus prayed from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). Jesus prayed for our forgiveness. This forgiveness is given freely to those who believe in Jesus as their Savior. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. God demonstrated his almighty power and opened the way for us to enter the kingdom of God (Lk 23:43). Now we can approach the holy God to have a personal relationship with him. We can see the kingdom of God. When we die, we will enter heaven to be with Jesus, where there is perfect love, joy and peace. We will reign with our Lord Jesus in the eternal kingdom of God. Paul preached this message of salvation to his fellow Jews in Corinth.

How did they respond to his preaching? They did not accept his passionate testimony about Jesus. Instead, they opposed Paul and became abusive. We don’t know how they abused him. Perhaps they threw eggs at him as he was walking to and from the synagogue. Perhaps they did much more than that to abuse him verbally and physically.

What did Paul do? 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” (6). Paul accepted their rejection as God’s direction to turn to the Gentiles. He knew that this was God’s will. He remembered that God had called him to be 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). Look at verse 8. *“Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.”* It was a great work of God that the synagogue ruler was converted. His entire household and many other Corinthians were converted. The church in Corinth was beginning to grow, right next door to the synagogue. We can imagine how much Paul suffered in this situation. He had to face the hostile Jews, not just once, but on a daily basis.

How did the Lord encourage him? Let us read 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.”* The Lord visited him to encourage him. He knew the persecutions were unbearable for Paul. Despite the spiritual fruit in Corinth, Paul was afraid. He didn’t know what the enemies were plotting against him next. But the Lord told him that he did not have to worry. This is an important lesson for us to remember because we often become discouraged and fearful as we struggle to serve young people with the gospel of Jesus. What can we learn from the encouraging words of the Lord?

**First, “Do not be afraid.”** Paul was not a weak man. In Lystra, the hostile Jews stoned him and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But when he regained conscience, he got up and went back into the city (Ac 14:20). In Philippi, he sang hymns and prayed in the jail, right after being beaten and severely flogged (Ac 16:25). He was a courageous man of God. Still, he had weak moments. The Lord saw fear in his heart. Paul might have been tired of the constant abuse. How long would the attacks go on? Will it ever end? He began to have nightmares about God’s sheep being attacked by the wolves. The Lord spoke to him, “Do not be afraid.” Paul did not have to be afraid because God was with him. Fear does not come from God. Satan plants fear in us. What should we do if we have fear about our future or our health? We must put our trust in the Lord. We should hear him say to us, “Do not be afraid, my child!”

**Second, “Keep on speaking, do not be silent.”** Paul knew well that the vicious attacks would end, if he stopped speaking about Jesus. We also feel like giving up when we are discouraged. We pray so much for our Bible students and prepare delicious spiritual food to share with them, but sometimes all we get from them is indifference and cold shoulder. We get discouraged. We want to complain to God, “Lord, why should I even bother them? My life is hard as it is!” But the Lord says, “Keep on speaking, do not be silent.” He wants to understand his broken heart for them.

Some time ago, M. Pauline Lee was inviting students to Bible study on campus when Satan tried to silence her. A student called the police on her. When the police

arrived, Pauline calmly explained that she was simply inviting students to the word of God. Then the police asked her where she parked her car. Pauline told them that she parked it outside the campus. Do you know what the police did next? They gave her a visitor's parking permit so that she could park her car on campus. It was God's way of saying to her, "Keep on speaking; do not be silent."

**Third, "For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you."** The attacks in Corinth were not new to Paul. During his mission journey, Paul had often experienced a pattern. After initial success, he had to face strong opposition, then persecution and rejection. At times, he felt alone in his battle. Now the same was happening in Corinth. How long would he have to endure the persecutions? But the Lord spoke to his heart, "I am with you." Jesus is the 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. The same is true for us.

**Fourth, "because I have many people in this city."** Paul felt alone and tired in the city. He was like the Prophet Elijah after his battle against the Baal priests (1Ki 19:3-4). He felt alone. He wanted to die. But God had told Elijah that he had reserved 7,000 people whose knees had not bowed down to Baal (1Ki 19:18). Jesus also encouraged Paul in his vision. The Lord said he had many people in Corinth. Actually, this turned out to be true. As Jesus said, many people became Christians in Corinth. In addition to those who appear in this passage and many other nameless saints, the Bible mentions the following names: Phoebe (Ro 16:1); Tertius (Ro 16:22), Erastus (Ro 16:23), Quartus (Ro 16:23), Chloe (1Co 1:11), Gaius (1Co 1:14), Stephanas and his family (1Co 16:15), Fortunatus (1Co 16:17), and Achaicus (1Co 16:17). We have to remember this when we feel alone. God has many believers around us. We are not alone!

Did Paul's situation improve immediately after the vision of Jesus? No. Actually, the opposition seemed to gain momentum. The hostile Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court (12). They charged him for holding illegal worship services contrary to the Jewish law (13). However, Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, dismissed their charge. He paid no attention to them at all, even as they began to beat Sosthenes the synagogue leader in front of him. In this way, God protected Paul and made gospel preaching possible in Corinth. God is the Sovereign Ruler of the world. When God is for us, no one can stand against us.

### III. A BEAUTIFUL HOUSE CHURCH (18-28)

Look at verse 18. *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 Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken.* Encouraged by the words of Christ, Paul stayed on in Corinth for more than one and half years, despite the persecutions (11,18). He loved his Bible students; he did not want to leave them alone. He continued to teach them the word of God (18). Then, before leaving the city, he did something unusual. He had his hair cut off at Cenchreae. We don't know why. The Nazarite vow described in Numbers 6 tells us that the person who

took a vow would shave his hair off when the vow was completed. Paul had taken a vow in Corinth, completing it before sailing for Syria. So what was his vow? Perhaps it was about focusing on discipleship ministry rather than mass evangelism, as I will explain later.

As Paul left Corinth for his home church in Antioch, Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him (18). What an amazing decision! Just like that, they packed up and left with Paul. 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” (21). He asked Priscilla and Aquila to remain in Ephesus to minister to them. Again, they agreed. They were willing to serve the Lord where they were needed. Paul then went to Caesarea, up to Jerusalem to greet the church, and finally returned to Antioch. This was the conclusion of 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.”* Paul’s second missionary journey took about five years, covering some 3,000 miles. It was action-packed trips with many victories, attacks, and persecutions. He deserved some rests. But he did not spend much time resting in Antioch. After spending some time there, he set out for his third mission journey. He loved the Lord and he loved God’s people. However, the character of his ministry was changing. On the first two trips, his work was evangelistic in nature, proclaiming the gospel to those who had not heard. He began 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. As we will learn in Acts 19, his ministry in Ephesus was focused on discipleship training.

In verses 24-28, we catch a glimpse of the beautiful house church of Priscilla and Aquila. They did not live as Christian yuppies. They packed up their belongings and moved with Paul to a new mission field. Obviously, Christ was Lord of their family. Interestingly, their names “Priscilla and Aquila” always appear together in the Bible (often with her name before his). They were an inseparable couple. More importantly, they used their home as a church to share the gospel of Jesus. We know that this is not easy, especially because we cannot have privacy. But Priscilla and Aquila loved Jesus and his sheep more than their privacy.

How did they use their house church to advance the gospel? There was a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. Apollos had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He spoke with great fervor. He taught about Jesus accurately. The problem was that he knew only about the baptism of John, that is, the message of repentance. He did not know the baptism of the Holy Spirit, meaning he did not know personally the grace of Jesus. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him speak, they realized his problem immediately. They invited him to their home to help him. Priscilla must have cooked a delicious dinner. Then, with respect and understanding, they explained to him the way

of God more adequately (26). They helped him to accept Jesus in his heart as his personal Lord and Savior. With the help of Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos became a great evangelist. He was sent to Corinth as a missionary, where he became a great help to those who by grace had believed. Verse 28 says that “he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.” Apollos became a useful man to God. It was the fruit of one-to-one Bible study in Priscilla and Aquila’s house church. May God establish many beautiful house churches among us!

Today, we learn that when Paul was fearful and discouraged, the Lord came to him and said, “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking.” Paul stayed in Corinth to preach the gospel, despite the persecutions. May we hear the Lord speaking to each of us, “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking”!