

Acts 18:1-18

Introduction

1. I've always been more of an optimist than a pessimist so I'm not generally prone to discouragement
2. However, that doesn't mean I don't get discouraged at times, whether it's in life, work, or even ministry
3. When we think of the Apostle Paul, we don't generally think of him getting discouraged or needing encouragement, but knowing what he faced it's not hard to imagine that there may have been times where his spirits were low
4. I can't say with a high degree of certainty exactly what Paul might have been feeling when he arrived at Corinth, but there are some hints in our passage today and elsewhere that he might have been feeling a little discouraged or afraid
5. With that in mind, as I studied the passage, I was struck by the number of things the Lord does that would have encouraged Paul
6. There are five I'd like to look at together this morning

A. The Lord encouraged Paul with new ministry partners and friends (READ 18:1-3)

1. After leaving Athens, Paul traveled to Corinth:
 - a. It was a fairly new city less than 100 years old, but was large by ANE standards--a population of well over 200,000 people (larger than Athens)
 - b. It sat on a small 20-mile-long by 5-mile-wide isthmus (land bridge) which not only controlled the north-south foot traffic between the Greek mainland and southern Greece, but the east-west traffic between two major bodies of water; it pretty much controlled the trade routes between Rome and Asia
 - c. This made Corinth a strategic city not only economically but militarily as well, and people from all over the Roman empire would travel in and out of the city
 - d. Much like Athens, Corinth was a very religious city with Egyptian, Roman and Greek cults, as well as temples and shrines dedicated to gods like Apollo, Poseidon, and the most notable, Aphrodite whose temple stood atop the Acrocorinth which was essentially a 1900 foot mountain
 - e. The city was also known for its licentiousness and immorality; William Barclay, in his commentary wrote this:

"She had a reputation for commercial prosperity, but she was also a byword for evil living. The very [phrase], to live like a Corinthian, had become a part of the Greek language, and meant to live with drunken and immoral debauchery...Aelian, the late Greek writer, tells us that if ever a Corinthian was shown upon the stage in a Greek play he was shown drunk. The very name Corinth was synonymous with debauchery and there was one source of evil in the city which was known all over the civilized world. Above the isthmus towered the hill of Acropolis, and on it stood the great temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. To that temple there were attached one thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes, and in the evening, they descended from the Acropolis and plied their trade upon the streets of Corinth, until it became a Greek proverb, 'It is not every man who can afford a journey to Corinth.' In addition to these cruder sins, there flourished far more recondite vices, which had come in with the traders and the sailors from the ends of the earth, until Corinth became not only a synonym for wealth and luxury, drunkenness and debauchery, but also for filth." (William Barclay, The Letters to the Corinthians, p. 2-3)

2. When Paul arrived, he met two other Jews, a husband and wife named Aquila and Priscilla:

- a. They had recently come to Corinth from Italy because Emperor Claudius had kicked all the Jews out of Rome
 - b. Luke tells us that Paul both stayed and worked with them because they had something in common: all three were tent-makers by trade
 - c. There's some debate whether or not Priscilla and Aquila were saved at this point, but there really isn't any way to know for sure:
 - 1) The fact that Luke refers to them only as Jews and not as believers might suggest they were not yet saved, but were led to Christ by Paul
 - 2) However, when Claudius kicked the Jews out of Rome, one ancient historian claimed he did so because the Jews were rioting over "Chrestus" which is a Latinized form of Christos, the Greek translation of Messiah; so, it's possible that Priscilla and Aquila learned about Jesus while in Rome
 - 3) Whether they were saved when Paul met them or not, they certainly were by the time Paul left Corinth (as is clear when they are mentioned elsewhere in the NT)
3. Think about why meeting these two might have been an encouragement to Paul:
- a. He had just come from Athens where it appears he had only a few converts, all of whom appear to be Gentiles; this was in spite of the fact that he reasoned with Jews and Gentiles daily in both the synagogue and marketplace, and even after having been invited to share the Gospel before the city council at the Areopagus
 - b. He then left Silas and Timothy behind and traveled all by himself to Athens, the Sin City of ancient Greece filled with every kind of filth and vice you can imagine
 - c. So, he's essentially all alone, but lo and behold, the Lord leads him to Priscilla and Aquila:
 - 1) They were fellow Jews who not only provide him with a place to stay but a place to work (they likely had their own shop in the marketplace from which all three worked)
 - 2) But, they became much more to Paul:
 - They became his traveling companions when he left Corinth for Ephesus (18:18-19)
 - They served the church in Ephesus in his absence, and when he returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey, they were still there hosting a church in their home (1 Corinthians 16:19) and ultimately worked alongside Paul for another three years during his stay at Ephesus—when Paul wrote Romans from Ephesus he referred to them as his "**co-workers in Christ Jesus**" (Romans 16:3)
 - They even "**risk[ed] their necks**" for Paul at one point (possibly during the riot in Ephesus)
 - We know at some point they returned home to Rome for a short time and hosted a church in their house there as well, but they ultimately returned to Ephesus and ministered alongside Timothy when Paul is in prison in Rome—at the end of his life he even asked Timothy to greet them on his behalf (2 Timothy 4:19)
 - d. We can't help but see how these two became a huge encouragement to Paul

How the Lord has blessed me through my relationship with Dustin

B. The Lord encouraged Paul with His provision (READ 18:4-5)

1. I have to imagine that just seeing Silas and Timothy again was a huge encouragement to Paul—they were his friends, traveling companions, and co-workers in Christ

2. However, there was another reason why Paul would have been encouraged by their arrival—it freed him up to devote himself to full-time ministry:
 - a. Paul made it a point to work making tents so that he could provide for his needs and those of his co-workers so that they wouldn't be a burden to those to whom they were ministering (he stresses this in his letters to the Corinthians and Thessalonians)
 - b. For this reason, he was limited in how much time he could devote to pure ministry when he was at Corinth
 - c. However, when Silas and Timothy arrived, he was able to devote himself “**completely to the word**”
 - d. One reason he was able to do this was because Silas and Timothy brought with them a financial gift from the churches in Macedonia (especially the Philippians) who “**fully supplied**” his needs (see 2 Corinthians 11:9 & Philippians 4:10-15)
3. We know Paul's passion wasn't to make tents; his passion was to preach the Gospel and make disciples and to be freed up to do that full-time would have been a huge blessing and encouragement to him

C. The Lord encouraged Paul with good news (1 Thessalonians 2, 3)

1. For this next one, we have to look elsewhere in the Bible because Luke doesn't record it here, but it is directly related to the arrival of Silas and Timothy
2. If you remember, when Paul was ministering in Thessalonica the Jews started a riot and he was ultimately sent away by the church under the cover of night for his own safety (Acts 17)
3. Something similar happened at Berea so after leaving there, Paul had two things on his mind and we see these recorded in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5 (READ):
 - a. The first was he knew the Thessalonians would be worried about him and the persecution he was facing
 - b. The second, he was worried that Satan might tempt them to abandon their faith and his ministry to them might have been in vain
4. By the time he makes it to Athens, he can't stand it anymore so he sends Timothy back to Thessalonica to not only encourage them but to find out how they are doing (READ 1 Thessalonians 3:5-8)
5. When Silas and Timothy finally arrive in Corinth in our passage today, Timothy delivers the great news to Paul that the Thessalonians are standing strong
6. We know this was a huge encouragement to Paul because immediately after receiving news he wrote from Corinth the letter to the Thessalonians we just read, in which he claims “**for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we really live, if [since] you stand firm in the Lord.**” (1 Thessalonians 3:7-8)—there were two things at the heart of Paul's joy here:
 - a. He was obviously happy for the Thessalonians sake
 - b. However, he was encouraged because it also confirmed that his ministry to them was not in vain; his hard work and obedience Jesus paid off

Steve Shiplet recounting to me what he learned during one of my Wednesday night teaching times from years earlier

D. The Lord encouraged Paul with His sovereignty (18:6-8)

1. Can you imagine how discouraging it must have been for Paul to see the majority of his fellow Jews constantly reject the Gospel in city after city? —we know he had an intense love and passion for them and longed for them to know the Savior (Romans 9:3): **“For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my countrymen, my kinsmen according to the flesh,”**
2. To make things even more discouraging, he was personally rejected, threatened, persecuted, beaten, jailed, and run out of the synagogues and cities by the very people he was trying to help!
3. We see a similar response here in Corinth and I imagine it must have been pretty discouraging to walk away from his fellow Jews once again knowing the judgement they would face (READ 18:6)
4. Paul might have left Corinth discouraged had it not been for what God did next; it’s an interesting chain of divinely orchestrated events that are filled with irony (READ 18:7-8):
 - a. First, when Paul is forced out of the synagogue, God immediately provides him with another place from which to teach...and it just so happens to be right next door to the synagogue!
 - 1) Titius Justus was a **“worshipper of God”** which meant he was a god-fearing Gentile (same phrase was used of Lydia in Acts 16:14)
 - 2) The language Luke uses—that Paul **“departed from there and went to the house...”**—implies that Paul moved his teaching from the synagogue to Titius’ house; in other words, it became the based for his ministry
 - 3) While Luke doesn’t state specifically whether Titius was a Christian, at a minimum he was open to Paul’s teaching because he let Paul use his house for teaching
 - 4) This would have been a very strategic place because anyone going to the synagogue—Jew and Gentile alike—would have had to pass by Titius’ house and it may have actually led to what happens next
 - b. What the Lord does next is even more ironic—He saves not only the leader of the synagogue but his entire household!
 - c. Finally, in another ironic twist, when many of the Gentile Corinthians hear that Crispus, a Jew, got saved, they **“were believing and being baptized”** themselves!
5. It’s hard to image that this didn’t encourage Paul, not merely because some had responded to the Gospel, but because of the way in which God demonstrated His sovereign control over everything

E. The Lord encouraged Paul with His divine protection (18:9-17)

1. As we’ve seen over the last few chapters, there was a pattern developing for Paul’s ministry:
 - a. He would enter a city and begin preaching the Gospel at the synagogue
 - b. Sometimes only a few would respond to the Gospel, while at other times large numbers would respond
 - c. However, no sooner than people would start coming to Christ, the opposition and persecution would start as well
 - d. It happened at Iconium, then Antioch, Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and even Athens to a lesser extent

- e. The same thing would soon happen at Corinth as well and we have to think—based on the pattern—that Paul even expected it
2. However, the Lord had some encouraging words for Paul (READ 18:9-10):
 - a. We don't generally think of Paul being afraid, but can we blame him if he was at times with the constant abuse he faced? (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-27)
 - b. I think it would be fair to assume that Paul expected the opposition to begin any day at Corinth, especially after the synagogue leader and many of the Corinthian Gentiles came to Christ because he had seen the Jews become jealous and violent over the same thing before
 - c. What we know of Paul, any trepidation he might have felt likely wouldn't have prevented him from preaching the Gospel, but nonetheless the Lord speaks to him in a vision and encourages him to not be afraid and to keep on preaching the Gospel (there are three promises the Lord makes):
 - 1) The Lord would be with him
 - 2) No one would harm him
 - 3) The Lord had some peeps in the city <grin>: **"many people in this city"**
 - d. There's no doubt Paul was encouraged and strengthened by this (READ 18:11):
 - 1) Luke doesn't always tell us exactly how long Paul stayed in each city, but the evidence suggests that in most instances it was anywhere from a few weeks to a few months—quite often because of being run out of town or because of the danger
 - 2) That was probably Paul's plan or expectation at Corinth as well, but after the Lord's promise he decided to stay in Corinth for a year and a half
 3. It wasn't long before the opposition started and we see the Lord made good on his promise to Paul (READ 18:12-18):
 - a. The Jews rise up and brought Paul before Gallio, the proconsul of southern Greece
 - b. They accuse Paul of persuading men to worship God contrary to their Jewish Law
 - c. But, before Paul can even open his mouth to defend himself, Gallio shuts down the Jews and refuses to put up with them and their complaint and sends them away
 - d. In response, they attack one of their own, the new leader of the synagogue named Sosthenes (NOTE: in another ironic twist, at some point Sosthenes becomes a believer because Paul refers to him as **"Sosthenes our brother"** in 1 Corinthians 1:1)
 - e. Paul must have been encouraged by how the Lord protected him because according to Luke, he **"remained many days longer"** after the confrontation
 - f. In fact, many scholars believe that the vow described in 18b was a personal vow of thanksgiving thanking the Lord for his protection
 4. This might make us wonder why the Lord protected Paul this time but not at others, and that is a bit of a mystery. I suspect Paul's response might be "I don't know" followed up with what he wrote to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 12:10): **"...I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."**
 5. None the less, it's hard to not see how in this particular instance, God's promise to protect him, and His subsequent actions in doing so, would not have been an encouragement to Paul

Conclusion

1. As we reflect on the many ways the Lord encouraged Paul at Corinth, can you see the way the Lord might have encouraged you in the same ways?
2. Can you remember a time when the Lord brought a new friend or friends into your life to encourage you?
3. What about when He provided exactly what you needed when you needed it? Were you encouraged by it?
4. Was there a time when you were worried or concerned and the Lord delivered good news that lifted your spirits and put your heart and mind at ease?
5. Have you ever seen Him do something in your life that you KNEW was clearly His way of reminding you that He is sovereign and still in control of all things?
6. Maybe there have been times when you know He's protected you. When you reflect on those, does it encourage you?