

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 7-17-16 AM NOTES
"THE POWER OF PERSEVERANCE"
ACTS 18-28
#23 (Final) in Series, "Acts: The Spirit, the Church, and the World"

"It is always too soon to quit!"

—Dr. V. Raymond Edman

"By perseverance, the snail reached the ark."

—Charles Spurgeon

2 Corinthians 11:23b-28 "...in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches."

"Although he [William Cary, 1761-1834] had only an elementary education, by the time he was in his teens, he could read the Bible in six languages. He later became the professor of Oriental languages at Fort William College in Calcutta, and his press at Serampore provided Scriptures in over 40 languages and dialects for more than 300 million people." In speaking to his nephew, Cary said, "Eustice, if after my removal anyone should think it worthwhile to write my life, I will give you a criterion by which you may judge of its correctness. If he gives me credit for being a plodder, he will describe me justly. Anything beyond this will be too much. I can plod. That is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything."

—Warren Weirsbe

"In this age of fast food, digests and quick fixes, plodding is not held in high esteem; but it is still the plodders who are getting things done, a day at a time, a step at a time. Paul had the plodders in mind when he wrote: 'And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary' (Galatians 6:9)... Plodders have their eyes on the goal; they resist every effort to get them on a detour. 'This one thing I do!' is their special verse (Philippians 3:13)."

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Romans 5:3 "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance."

Hebrews 12:2-3 "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

James 5:11a "We count those blessed who endured."

I. Persistence in Discouragement (Paul at Corinth—Acts 18)

Numbers 11:11 "So Moses said to the Lord, 'Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me?'"

Numbers 11:14-15 "I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness."

1 Kings 19:4 "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.'"

Acts 18:1 "After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth."

1 Thessalonians 3:7 “for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith.”

Acts 18:2a “And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla...”

koinonia – “sharing a common life” (The New English Bible)

Acts 18:9-10 “And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.’”

Jonah 2:9 “Salvation is from the Lord.”

Ephesians 1:4-5 “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.”

Acts 18:6 “But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’”

II. Persistence in Detention (Jerusalem and Caesarea—Acts 21-26)

Acts 19:10 (HCSB) “And this went on for two years, so that all the inhabitants of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the message about the Lord.”

Acts 21:27b-29 “Jews from Asia saw him in the temple complex, stirred up the whole crowd, and seized him, shouting, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place. What’s more, he also brought Greeks into the temple and has profaned this holy place.’ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple complex.”

Acts 24:24-25 “After some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and listened to him on the subject of faith in Christ Jesus. Now as he spoke about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became afraid and replied, ‘Leave for now, but when I find time I’ll call for you.’”

Acts 26:28 “Agrippa replied to Paul, ‘In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.’”

III. Persistence in Danger (The Trip to Rome—Acts 27:1 – 28:10)

Acts 28:3-5 “But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, ‘Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.’ However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.”

2 Timothy 4:7-8 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

First Baptist Church Powell 7 17 2016 AM
Chapter 23: The Power of Perseverance
Series: The Spirit, the Church, and the World
Acts 18-28

An essential and yet overlooked character trait that is necessary to be greatly used of God is perseverance. Dr. V. Raymond Edman, when he was President of Wheaton College, used to say to students, "It is always too soon to quit!"

Charles Spurgeon reminded his London congregation, "By perseverance, the snail reached the ark." As we sum up the remainder of the book of Acts, I want to focus in on this essential character quality that we see so clearly displayed in the Apostle Paul's life and ministry. Paul was obviously scholarly, fearless, gifted, driven to share the Gospel, compassionate, loyal, and a host of other character qualities we could name. However, something that is often overlooked in Paul's life that is one of the main reasons he was so amazingly used by God was his perseverance; he just refused to quit!

The more I look at this man's life and ministry, the more I am convinced that his perseverance was one of the main reasons he succeeded in all that God gave him to do. Paul was not called to the easy places to accomplish easy things. He was persecuted, stoned and drug outside the city and left for dead. He was beaten and put in prison in shackles. He was deeply discouraged in Corinth, falsely accused and when unjustly put in prison he discovered a plot to kill him. A corrupt government official who should have released him, kept him in prison because he was waiting for a bribe. Paul appealed to Caesar to hear his case and on the way to Rome he was involved in a shipwreck and after he made it to land he was bitten by a deadly poisonous snake. That is just a sampling of the trials he endured. Most any one of those trials would have stopped most people.

When the book of Acts closes, we find Paul still under house arrest. Paul did not have a pampered easy life! He summarized some of the hard times that he had been through in 2 Corinthians 11:23b-28:

...in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.

Yet in 2 Corinthians 4:17, Paul describes all that he has been through as "momentary, light affliction." Light affliction? What courage, what perseverance!

Throughout Christian history, we see that the men and women God mightily used were not always the most intelligent, the most trained, or the ones that man would have picked. One quality possessed by nearly all of the people that God consistently used to accomplish His purposes was perseverance.

Warren Weirsbe wrote a little book entitled *In Praise of Plodders!* In chapter one of the small book, he focuses on the quality of perseverance in missionary William Cary (1761-1834) who is widely called, "the father of modern missions." Weirsbe says:

Although he had only an elementary education, by the time he was in his teens, he could read the Bible in six languages. He later became the professor of Oriental languages at Fort William College in Calcutta, and his press at Serampore provided Scriptures in over 40 languages and dialects for more than 300 million people. In speaking to his nephew, Cary said, "Eustice, if after my removal anyone should think it worthwhile to write my life, I will give you a criterion by which you may judge of its correctness. If he gives me credit for being a plodder, he will describe me justly. Anything beyond this will be too much. I can plod. That is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything."

What is a plodder? A plodder is someone who just keeps on even when things get messy and difficult. Weirsbe goes on to say:

In this age of fast food, digests and quick fixes, plodding is not held in high esteem; but it is still the plodders who are getting things done, a day at a time, a step at a time. Paul had the plodders in mind when he wrote: 'And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we

shall reap if we do not grow weary' (Galatians 6:9)... Plodders have their eyes on the goal; they resist every effort to get them on a detour. "This one thing I do!" is their special verse (Philippians 3:13).

[Warren Weirsbe, *In Praise of Plodders!* page 11-13]

The Scriptures themselves speak of perseverance often (even in verses where the word "perseverance" isn't used). Romans 5:3: "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance."

We see the perseverance of Jesus in Hebrews 12:2-3: "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

James 5:11a: "We count those blessed who endured." Someone said, "The measure of a Christian is what it takes to stop him/her." I believe that the Scripture bears that out.

For the remainder of this message, I want to wrap up our study in Acts by focusing on the Apostle Paul in several different challenges and learn from His example how to persevere in challenging times. One thing all believers have in common is that they go through troubling times that tempt them to quit what God has given them to do. My prayer is that God will use the example of this man of God to encourage us to persist in the path God has put us on.

I. Persistence in Discouragement (Paul at Corinth – Acts 18)

Think with me about all of God's servants in the Bible who were discouraged. Listen to Moses own words in Numbers 11:11: "So Moses said to the Lord, 'Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me?'" Moses goes on to say in Numbers 11:14-15: "I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness."

I think that qualifies as being discouraged! Elijah knew discouragement. Following his flight from the wicked queen Jezebel he said to God in 1 Kings 19:4: "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.'" In addition to these examples, we find Joshua, King Hezekiah, Job, and a host of other Godly people who were discouraged. I want to focus on the Apostle Paul.

We read in Acts 18:1: "After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth." Corinth is about a fifty-three mile walk from Athens. Corinth had replaced Athens as the leading commercial center of Greece. The chief attractions of Corinth were the pagan temples where false gods were worshipped through sexual immorality with temple prostitutes. Sexual immorality had been turned into a religious sacrament! The city was filled with brothels. Immorality was so bad in Corinth that to "Corinthianize" became a synonym for sexual immorality. A "Corinthian girl" was a euphemism for a prostitute. There could be somewhat of a comparison to Las Vegas today except that the attractions were pagan temples rather than casinos. This sin saturated city with no Christians in it was deeply discouraging to Paul. He was writing from Corinth when he wrote to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:7: "for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith." The reason their faith was so encouraging is that there was none in Corinth!

From Acts 18, I want us to examine how God worked in Paul's life to enable him to persevere in his discouragement.

First, our gracious Lord sent other Christians. Acts 18:2a: "And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla..." We are not told how they came to Christ, but it seems that they were already believers when Paul met them. This couple became two of Paul's dearest friends. Romans 16:3-4 tells us that they even risked their lives for Paul. Soon after meeting Aquila and Priscilla, Silas and Timothy came to Corinth. We were not designed to live the Christian life alone. God wired us so that we need other believers (whether we realize that we need them or not). God created us as relational beings. Our greatest need is for a relationship with Him, but there is also a need for relationships with others. The culture we live in is not "relationship friendly."

What we call "social media" is really developing a culture that is anti-social. People are so consumed with social media and their high tech gadgets that they don't have time for face to face relationships. What we

really need (whether it is a felt need or not) is biblical fellowship. The Greek word that is translated “fellowship” is *koinonia*. The basic definition is “that which is common or shared.” The New English Bible translates *koinonia* as “sharing a common life.” These companions that God sent Paul were partners with him in establishing a church in Corinth. Fellowship involves sharing life together and the life we share is one of ministry, one of making disciples.

The second way Paul was ministered to was by Words from God Himself. The Lord spoke to Paul through a vision. I am not saying that God cannot do that today, but the normal way He speaks to us is through His completed written Word that Paul didn’t have. Acts 18:9-10: “And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.’”

In Paul’s discouragement, the Lord gives Paul a command and reminds Paul of His presence and preparation. The command is “do not be afraid any longer.” I doubt that Paul’s fear was related to personal harm coming to him. He was afraid that the task was too big for him. A church in Corinth? Humanly speaking there was no way this could happen in such a wicked place. The Lord reminds him that the work was not Paul’s; it was the Lord’s! We are told 365 times in the Bible to not be afraid. Corinth was an impossible place for Paul to build a church, but it was not impossible with the Lord. After the command to not be afraid, God assured Paul of His presence, “for I am with you.” When we study the New Testament, we find that indeed a church was planted in Corinth, and while it had problems, it was one of, if not the most fruitful church Paul planted.

Paul was encouraged when God let him know of the preparation that He had made that assured success. God said, “for I have many people in this city.” Let me explain what this did not mean. God was not saying that there were many Christians already in Corinth. A part of Paul’s fear was because there were no believers there in that sin-soaked city.

I am going to share truth with you that I don’t fully understand but that I fully believe. There are two truths in the Bible that we cannot fully reconcile, but both are clearly taught. I am speaking of the responsibility of man to repent and believe the Gospel, and the sovereignty of God in electing or choosing those who are to be saved.

When it comes to salvation, Jonah 2:9 summarizes it best: “Salvation is from the Lord.” What is being spoken of here is called the doctrine of election. The Bible teaches clearly that there is no salvation apart from a lost person hearing the Gospel, choosing to repent of their sin, and putting their faith in Christ and His finished work on the cross (the responsibility of man). But the Bible is clear that every person who comes to Christ is the elect of God – chosen by God from before the earth was created. Ephesians 1:4-5: “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.”

In Acts 18:6 we see man choosing to reject Christ. “But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’” But the Bible also clearly teaches that God will bring to salvation those whom He calls. Those that the Lord is speaking of in Acts 18:10 are chosen by the Lord, but must have the Gospel proclaimed to them so that they can choose to believe. Do you see why this really encouraged Paul? As he is faithful to share the Gospel, those that are those who will have their spiritual eyes opened and their deaf ears unlocked to hear and then choose to come savingly believing in Christ. That same encouragement is for us. God has “many people in this city” (Acts 18:10). We share with all we can, knowing that it is God who opens the blind eyes and deaf ears.

From chapter 18 of Acts we learn persistence in discouragement.

II. Persistence in Detention (Jerusalem and Caesarea – Acts 21-26)

Over and over in Acts we see that nothing can stop Paul. In this section of Acts, we see things happening to this man of God that are horribly unjust and deceitful. From Paul’s false arrest in Acts 21 through the rest of the book of Acts, Paul is a prisoner. Yet, even that couldn’t stop him! Let’s see how Paul got from sharing the Gospel in Corinth to being falsely arrested and spending most of the rest of his life in prison. After his fruitful ministry in Corinth, Paul went to Ephesus where he stayed about three years – the longest he stayed in any one place. There were many disciples made in Ephesus and in the surrounding areas. Acts 19:10 (HCSB): “And this went on for two years, so that all the inhabitants of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the message about the Lord.” It is somewhere in this time period that Paul senses a

deep burden to go to Jerusalem. He makes several short stops, meets once more with the leaders of the church at Ephesus and then sets sail for Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem Satan unleashes everything he has against Paul. We see a false accusation being leveled against Paul. Acts 21:27b-29:

Jews from Asia saw him in the temple complex, stirred up the whole crowd, and seized him, shouting, 'Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place. What's more, he also brought Greeks into the temple and has profaned this holy place.' For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple complex.

As the mob sought to kill Paul, the Roman soldiers came and rescued him. Paul talks the Roman soldiers into letting him address the mob. When the soldiers allow him to do so, Paul shares his testimony with the crowd (see the persistence?). The crowd listens until Paul says that God sent him to the Gentiles. That's when the mob got stirred up again. Paul was then put in what we would call "protective custody" by the Roman soldiers. This begins a long process that results in Paul not being released even by the end of the book of Acts.

My purpose is not to go through all the details of the incarceration. My purpose is to show you Paul's persistence. We find Paul sharing with the Roman Governor Felix. Acts 24:24-25: "After some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and listened to him on the subject of faith in Christ Jesus. Now as he spoke about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became afraid and replied, 'Leave for now, but when I find time I'll call for you.'"

Later, Paul gets to share with King Herod Agrippa. It is an interesting exchange as Paul shares the Gospel with King Agrippa. We see Agrippa's response in Acts 26:28: "Agrippa replied to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.'"

How is your persistence? Did you try once to share the Gospel and the other person was hateful and you stopped sharing? Repent! We need to see that most every day God gives us unique opportunities and I for one do not want to miss them. I shudder to think of all the opportunities I have missed.

III. Persistence in Danger (The Trip to Rome – Acts 27:1-28:10)

When we get to chapter 27, it has come time for Paul to go to appear before Caesar. In our culture, that would be similar to appealing to the Supreme Court, but under Roman law, every citizen had that right. You see the sovereign hand of God in all of Paul's trials. Paul was able to share the Gospel with people that he would never have had the opportunity to talk with apart from this providential working by God in circumstances that allowed Paul to share with governors, kings, and now with the emperor, or at least a high official that the emperor knows. On the way to Rome, there is more adventure.

Paul, and some Roman soldiers, and prisoners, are put on a cargo ship to head to Rome. A storm comes up and the ship breaks apart, but through Paul's leadership every person makes it to shore. On shore, Paul is gathering wood for a fire when a snake bites him. Acts 28:3-5:

But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.

Paul is then able to share with the people of the island. I am amazed at his persistence.

Conclusion

When Paul gets to Rome, he was given a place to stay and the guard allowed guests to come. It was in Rome that Paul wrote some of the Epistles that are in our New Testament. In what God causes and allows, He is working out His purposes and His will. We can trust Him. Don't quit when things don't work out as you have planned. Stick with that ministry God called you to until you know beyond a doubt that He has moved you. Oh that we would be a church with persistence. Do you want to know the end result of a life characterized by persistence? Using Paul as our example, you will be able to say with him in 2 Timothy 4:7-8: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."