

Acts 18: 1-11; “The Lord’s Help at Corinth”, Sermon # 66 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.

It is possible that when the apostle Paul came to Corinth that he was somewhat downcast. There had not been many of the philosophers at Athens, or other people, who had come to Christ. Compared with what he had seen the Lord do in other places like Thessalonica and Berea, the results were not very encouraging. And then, his co-workers Silas and Timothy were not yet back with him at that time when he first came to Corinth. They had not arrived yet to help him in the ministry. And then, too, he was low on money and he knew that he was going to need to work to provide for his own needs.

And so at this time I want to show you how the Lord ministered to Paul’s spirit to encourage him through the brethren around him, to continue on in his ministry. We want to see how it was, that the Lord brought him out of his discouragement. 1st of all – We will look at how the Lord, through Priscilla and Aquila, helped Paul. 2nd – We will look at how Silas and Timothy and a man named Justus helped Paul during and after his preaching. And 3rd – We will look at how the Lord Himself helped Paul by speaking to him in a vision of the night. The object of this message is to learn for all of us to think about what we can do to encourage the minister of the gospel by our laboring together with him as his friends.

1st of all – We will look at how the Lord, through Priscilla and Aquila, helped Paul.

When Paul came to Corinth, it says in verse 2, he found a certain Jew named Aquila, who was born in Pontus, and who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla. They came there because the Emperor Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome. It appears that this man and his wife were converted to Christ sometime earlier, perhaps even on the day of Pentecost, for there were in Jerusalem on that day, some from the province of Pontus. Anyway, Paul somehow “found” this man. And he discovered that he and his wife were Christians, and so he decided to stay with them because he was of the same trade, it says in verse 3. By the way, none of this came about by accident, or by coincidences. The Lord ordained that they would meet, and that this relationship of Paul with Priscilla and Aquila would be a long lasting one.

The Lord providentially ordered the circumstances so that when Paul came to Corinth, he found them. The lead in, was they they were, all of them, of the same trade. They were tentmakers. So, on the Sabbath days, as the apostle Paul, had his ministry from the Lord Himself, as an apostle and a preacher and a teacher, he deliberately went and reasoned in the synagogue, it says in verse 4. And he was persuading both Jews and Greeks. This was a great encouragement to Paul, after the resistance and opposition he had received at Athens. But what was also very encouraging to him was that he now had friends who were also brethren in that pagan city. And that these friends “happened” to be in the same trade that he was.

What an encouraging thing this must have been for Paul, that they could join together in their work, and have good fellowship and interaction with each other over many subjects, both doctrinal and practical related to their mutual desire to see Christ’s kingdom advanced. No doubt they spent many profitable days, working together and sharing fellowship together, while they were doing their work. This was a great blessing that the Lord let him find these brethren who would become his close friends in the Lord.

It is a good thing for a Christian minister to have friends by the way. And it is a good thing when occasionally, he is able to work together with the other brethren in the church on some project where his skills in other things besides preaching can be used. Many times I have personally done this in our church here. Before I was became a minister, I used to be a full time painter and wallpaperer by trade. Brethren, I want to talk to you now about having a trade for a

few moments here. It is a good thing for a Christian minister, that if, before he becomes a minister that he has opportunity to learn a trade of some sort. If he has been raised to learn a trade, and has attempted from his teenage years on up, to engage in it, this is a good thing I am saying. This trade of a tentmaker, Paul probably learned from his own father, when he was growing up. It did him in good stead all through the time of his earthly ministry.

Sometimes it happens that a man who wants to go into the ministry, does not understand the importance of learning to work to support his own needs. He may think that all that is required of him is to go to college, and then to seminary where he attains a degree, or multiple degrees, and then he concludes that the education which he has obtained academically is what qualifies him to be able to minister to people. The people of any particular church who is looking for a minister might also see these qualifications and call him immediately, because they see that he has learned so much from books.

Well, this may happen. And yet both the minister and the people may not be very happy for several reasons. The man knows many things in theology, but of the practical skills of life he knows very little. He knows little of having worked hard at a job. He knows little of how houses are built and maintained, or what it means to work together with other people to accomplish a goal in industry or business. He knows very little about being the head of a household or putting things in order in that household. And so, the whole church can be affected by a pastor's lack of practical skill in living his life in relation to his not having much of a history of working for a living.

All of us should understand that academic learning is desirable in a minister. It most certainly is. And perhaps it is very necessary for some aspects of his ministerial qualification, but if the church that a man goes to minister in, is small, and the financial ability of the members will not permit them to give him a sufficient salary which will enable him to meet his needs, then a problem may arise. How can he pay his bills on such a small income? How can he meet his own needs and the needs of his family in a situation like this? This portion of scripture here is very helpful. He should have a trade or some other occupation to fall back on, at such a time.

It is a very humbling thing to see here, is it not? The apostle Paul, one of the most eminent ministers in the early church, becoming a tentmaker for a time. He was still, during that time, devoting himself to the preaching of the word of God on Sabbath days. But I am saying that he was not ashamed to also be a tentmaker, when his needs required it. I am convinced that if a man wants to be a minister a minister of a local church, and he has not yet learned the meaning of hard work at some kind of labor or trade, it may become impossible for him to continue on in the ministry. He may not have developed the discipline necessary to be able to continue on to providing for his own needs and ministering to the church.

But in Acts 20: 32-35 we find Paul saying this – “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” “I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.” “Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.” “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak.” “And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Paul also says in 1st Timothy 5: 18 – “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain; and, ‘the laborer is worthy of his wages.’”

And so, it is evident from the scriptures that any church who calls a man to be their full-time pastor ought to be willing to pay him a reasonable salary. In 1st Corinthians 9, verse 14, he says – “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. So, you see, a man should not be permanently bi-vocational. The congregation should

not allow him to continue as a part-time minister indefinitely. No, there ought to be a constant re-evaluation of their ability to support him. And hopefully, then, as people are added to the church, he will be able to step back entirely from being bi-vocational. This is what happened in my own particular case. And I have never regretted not having the trade of having been a painter. It was a great help to me, and also to this congregation in the early years of my ministry.

Now, getting back to Priscilla and Aquila, we find that they were a great encouragement to Paul spiritually, as well as in their working together at the same trade with him. Paul, after he preached, he saw many Corinthians believe and be baptized, it says in verse 8. In verse 11, it says that he spent a year and six months in Corinth teaching the word of God among them. No doubt, Aquila and Priscilla helped him some in this good work. It appears that they together had a gift related to helping younger believers to better understand the Scriptures. This is what they did for Apollos when he came to Ephesus. It says in Acts 18: 24 – “When Aquila and Priscilla heard him teach, and they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

They are also commended by Paul in the book of Romans chapter 16, verse 3, as being his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for his life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles”. Truly, they were Paul’s helpers in many ways. Brethren, I ask you now to consider what you might do as my helpers in the preaching of the gospel? Could you help in the Bible Club? Could you help in the distribution of gospel tracts, something which I will be undertaking in a few weeks? Could you help in the Nursing Home ministry? Will you be a person who will visit the poor and needy? Will you not consider what you might do to be my helper, and a helper of Christ in the spread of the gospel in coming days?

2nd – Let’s look at how Silas and Timothy and a man named Justus helped the apostle Paul, both during and after he preached, when he was at Corinth.

Verse 5 says – “When Silas and timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.” “But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean.’ “From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” “And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.” So, I want you to see from this passage just how much Paul was strengthened in his ministry by the coming of Silas and Timothy to help him. They would stand as witnesses to his God-given ministry, and by their very presence there with him, confirm the truth of what he was preaching.

Once again, we see confirmed for us here, that God doesn’t call men to be lone-ranger Christians, having a ministry which originated from their own desires to do things for Christ. God calls men to be ministers, who will work together other godly men in their church, to minister with them. A minster needs men to stand with him as he publicly preaches the gospel. We do not hear of Silas and Timothy preaching, although they may have at times. But Christian preachers should stand together, spiritually and physically when evangelism like this is taking place.

The Holy Spirit was confirming to them all that Paul should be the chief speaker because it says that he was “compelled” by the Spirit, it says in the New King James, to testify to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. In the King James it says that “he was pressed in the spirit” (that is, he was pressed in his own spirit, having been impressed by the Holy Spirit’s working with his own spirit, to preach in this very way). The ESV is very weak here. It says that Paul was “occupied with the word”. That is way too plain a statement for what was happening here. The New American Standard translation says – “Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.”

The word in the Greek is *συνεχω* (sunecho). Thayer's Greek Definitions says it means – "1) to hold together with constraint, to compress. 2) to press 3) of a strait, that forces a ship into a narrow channel. 4) of a cattle squeeze, that pushing in on each side, forcing the beast into a position where it cannot move so the farmer can administer medication. 4) to hold completely. 5) to hold fast. 6) to urge, impel. Such are some of the definitions. But we should understand that there was such a press upon Paul's spirit by the Holy Spirit that he felt compelled to confront them with the truth that he was devoted to preaching; that Jesus was their Christ.

He boldly and powerfully declared the truth of the gospel, making reference to the Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in Christ. And from the hearer's side of things, that there was no way to resist the conclusion that Jesus was the Christ except by opposing and blaspheming. And this was what a number of these Jewish men in the synagogue did. The Lord, the Spirit, was working in a powerful way through Paul, pressing his spirit to assert these life-changing truths. Paul knew, when the Jews in the synagogue opposed him, and blasphemed Christ, His Person and His work, what he should do. He shook out his garments and he said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean." "From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

When he shook out his garments, Paul was saying to them – I am not going to try to persuade you any further. You should receive the truth, but you will not and so I will leave you to your own false thinking. When he said – Your blood be upon your own heads, he was saying that they had brought this guilt of their own eternal condemnation upon themselves, by their sinful rejection of Christ. When he said – I am clean, he was saying that he was innocent and his own conscience was clear concerning them. They had offered the gospel to them, and they deliberately rejected it, and He could not be blamed for the loss of their eternal souls.

Now, we must remember that he was in the synagogue when he said these things, and after he said them, it says that he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Justus' house was very conveniently located next to the synagogue, and so people who had believed, or people who wanted to talk more about faith in Christ, could resort there to Paul, and talk with him more. All of this was providentially ordered by God so that Paul could be greatly helped in his ministry at this time, and the Lord's purposes accomplished with regard to everyone who had heard him in the synagogue.

It says that even Crispus the ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord with all of his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and they were baptized. What encouragement it was to the apostle Paul to have Justus invite him into his house. Justus saw the issue, that the Jews there, many of them were rejecting Christ and the gospel. He himself was believing it. And the proof of his believing it was that he immediately wanted to do this good work of his offering a place for Paul to stay so that he could continue to minister to anyone there who interested. According to some of the translations, his name was Titius Justus. Some commentators have speculated that his full name was Gaius Titius Justus, and have concluded that he was a Roman citizen. They have concluded that he was the Gaius who is mentioned in Romans 16: 23 and 1st Corinthians 1: 14.

It says there – "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name," he says there. But, we see here, that believing and being baptized go together at the beginning of the Christian life. Baptism is a church ordinance, and a church was forming here in Corinth. Many of the Corinthians in hearing the gospel, they believed it. And so, they were baptized, even Crispus' whole household. What an encouragement this must have been to Paul, and all those laboring with him. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household.

We should conclude certain things from the wording which we find here, things which I have consistently taught you concerning the ordinance of baptism. A household being baptized does not mean that there were infants who were being baptized, or that in any way, that salvation comes to a person by partaking of one of the sacraments. All of Crispus' household were old enough to repent and to believe for themselves. All of them understood the meaning of baptism. They knew that a person who believes in Christ for themselves, should be baptized after they have believed, and not before. A person is not saved by baptism but their baptism shows forth their faith publicly, to the church and to others watching. They are publicly declaring their faith in the One who has saved them, the One whom they are spiritually united to, now, by that faith. It is intended to be a witness to themselves and other watching, of what Christ has done for them.

3rd – We will look at how the Lord Himself helped Paul by speaking to him in a vision of the night.

Verses 9 and 10 – “Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’” This was no doubt the greatest encouragement of all to the apostle Paul during the time of his ministry at Corinth; hearing a word from the Lord Himself. And what a word it was. Do not be afraid, but speak. Paul and those with him had received so much opposition in the various places where they preached. And they knew how much persecution could hinder their work. But Paul was given the command from the Lord Himself that he should speak. He should not keep silent, for the Lord was with him.

This is the greatest of all blessings to a preacher, or to any church for that matter. It is, that God is with us. If we know that God is with us, we do not need to tremble or be afraid. We can go forth and make disciples of all the nations. God's promise to Paul here was that no one would attack him to hurt him during the year and a half that he would be there, teaching among them. And the reason that the Lord would not permit that to happen to Paul, during that time is also given. He said – I have many people in this city. He is not making a statement concerning how many people had already been won to Himself by Paul. He was making a clear statement of the people who would be won by Paul through his preaching and teaching of the word of God.

He was speaking to Paul in relation to all those whom He had chosen unto eternal life in that city who He would save through Paul's preaching during that time. These would most certainly be called by means of the gospel. They would be made His people, by the powerful working of His grace and His Holy Spirit. Therefore, my brethren, let us take heart as Paul took heart when he heard these words. The Lord Himself stands with us when we are faithful to Him. He will help us and give us encouragements through His work in the lives of every church member who desires to help forward the kingdom of God; all those who will stand with the preacher and see what they can do personally, by Christ's grace, to help out.