

27. His presence and His promise

February 9, 2014

I remember whenever my 2nd grade teacher left the classroom, sixty some kids in the room were talking at the same time, fighting , crying, bickering, and much more. Of course, the teacher's pet used to threaten us that he would tattletale on us to the teacher at his return. We used to hate that tattletale weasel, but we knew that he would do it in a heartbeat because he was a regular snitch.

Besides, the teacher made a promise to us before he left the classroom that anyone whose name was written down by that snitch would be beaten up by him when he returned. During that time in South Korea, parents used to encourage their kids' teachers to beat their kids with rods if they were out of line, or had low test scores. So naturally, we tried to behave ourselves because of the promise and the returning presence of the teacher.

To atheists, God's presence and promise are like silly fairy tales because they refuse the truth; to unbelievers with some shallow religious background, they are like a distant concept that does not apply to them because they have a false sense of security; to backslidden Christians, they are scary because they don't want to face Him; but to the born-again Christians who have been living for His glory , they are very precious to them because His presence and promises are encouragement.

That is what happened to our apostle Paul. The Lord gave him His presence and promise to take care of him when Paul was down and out. And He did. I believe that the Lord will do the same thing for us as we study this portion of the Book of Acts.

A. MEETING NEW FRIENDS AND TENT MAKING JOB

Acts 18:1-4 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

On their second missionary journey, Paul and his team traveled through Asia Minor, Macedonia, down to Athens. Paul arrived at Corinth the Sin City of Greece. It would be like arriving at Las Vegas with all of its glitter, luxury, and debauchery. A friend of mine, the late pastor John Michaels of Calvary Chapel Spring Valley in Las Vegas once told me that Las Vegas has the lowest crime rate in America as a major city , because in Vegas, just about everything is permissible by their law .

Thanks to its locations, Corinth was a center for both trade and travel. Money and vice, along with all the weird philosophies and strange religions, came to Corinth and found a home there. Corinth was the capital of Achaia region and one of the two most important cities Paul visited. The other was Ephesus.

Corinth was a city with a remarkable reputation for loose living and especially sexual immorality. In classical Greek, to 'act like a Corinthian' meant to 'practice fornication and adultery,' and a 'Corinthian companion' meant a 'prostitute.' This sexual immorality was permitted under the widely popular worship of Aphrodite, also known as Venus, the goddess of fertility and sexuality.

The temple of Aphrodite, in its great days, had one thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes and who, at evening, came down to the city streets to provide their trade.

I cannot imagine how this holy man of God apostle Paul felt in that city. I am sure that he was deeply saddened by the lowest depravity of humans and their spiritual condition. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul himself describes his inadequate feelings at this time:

1 Corinthians 2:1-3 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.

Corinth was a low point in Paul's life physically, emotionally, and even financially. You are wondering, "OK, preacher. Where did you get that idea 'low point financially'?" It's in the Bible. Did you notice that Paul worked with a couple named Aquila and Priscilla as a tentmaker? Obviously Paul had little money when he arrived at Corinth and he had to make tents to support himself.

This is where we get the Christian term "tentmaking" which, in general, refers to the activities of any Christian pastor or missionary who, while dedicating him or herself to the ministry of the Gospel, receives little or no pay for Christian work, but performs other jobs to provide support. I, too, have a couple of tentmaking businesses.

The Lord brought new friends, Aquila and Priscilla – friends for the rest of Paul's life. We don't know that whether they were Christians at this time. But it is entirely possible that Paul led them both to Jesus as they worked together as tentmakers.

We do know that this dedicated couple served most faithfully and even risked their lives for Paul according to Romans chapter 16. They assisted him in Ephesus where they even hosted a church in their home. Aquila and Priscilla were an important part of Paul's "team" and he thanked God for them. They are a good example of how "lay ministers" can help to further the work of the Lord.

I thank our Lord for people like Aquila and Priscilla in our church, people with hands, hearts, and homes dedicated to the work of the Lord. There is no way in the world I could do what I do without their help through Lord Jesus Christ. So I thank all those who co-labor with me and help me in so many ways.

B. MORE RESISTANCE FROM THE JEWS

Acts 18:5-8 When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. 6 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." 7 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. 8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

Whenever God is blessing a ministry, you can expect increased opposition as well as increased opportunities. After all, the enemy of God gets bent out of shape when we invade his territory and liberate his slaves. Such opposition is usually proof that God is at work, and this ought to encourage us. British preacher Charles Spurgeon used to say that the devil never kicks a dead horse.

In v6, Paul shook his garments and told them, "Your blood be upon your own heads."

This shows two interesting OT images:

1) To shake out one's garments was an act of judgment.

It means, "You have had your opportunity, but now it's over!"

Nehemiah 5:13a Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied."

2) To have blood on your hands means that you bear the responsibility for another's death because you were not faithful to warn him.

The image comes from the watchman on the city walls whose task it was to stay alert and warn of coming danger.

Ezekiel 3:18 When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.

But to have blood on your head means that you are to blame for your own judgment. The Jews had the opportunity to be saved, but they rejected it. Paul's hands were clean because he had been faithful to declare the message of the Gospel.

As I give an altar call at the end of each Sunday service, I see some unbelievers ignore God's invitation for their spirits. When they refuse to surrender their lives to the Lord, my hands are clean because I've been faithful to declare the salvation message of Jesus Christ to them and they are responsible for their own eternal destiny.

This should bring a very serious question to ourselves: How many God-given opportunities have we missed, for whatever the lame excuses we had, because we chose not to witness to the unbelievers who were brought to us by the Lord? Let's not make that mistake again.

What was Paul doing here in v6? Giving up in frustration and throwing his temper tantrum because they were not receiving Jesus? No, He was merely following Christ's counsel from Matthew chapter 7:

Matthew 7:6 Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

There is a time when the Holy Spirit tells us, "No more witnessing for this person," because of that person's stubborn rejection.

C. GOD'S PRESENCE AND HIS PROMISE

Acts 18:9-11 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." 11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

I wouldn't be surprised that the conversion of Crispus, an important Jewish leader, opened up more opportunities for evangelism and brought more opposition from the enemy. Dr. Luke does not give us the details, but I get the feeling that between v8 and 9, the situation became really difficult and dangerous again like the previous cities where Paul was. He may have been thinking about leaving the city when the Lord came to him and gave him the assurance that he needed.

It is just like our faithful Lord who speaks to us when we need Him the most. His tender voice of "Fear not!" can calm the raging storm in our hearts regardless of the cir-

cumstances around us. We have this Bible that contains thousands of God's promises to us. And they are ours to claim and believe. They are not some magic pills that make our situation changed from horrible to wonderful instantly. But they are His promises where our hearts can hold fast.

The next time when you feel alone and bombarded by the enemy's attacks, meditate on these promises of God:

Hebrews 13:5b I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Isaiah 41:10 Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.

Isaiah 43:1b-2 Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

Then, some of you will say, "Paul got to see the Lord's presence in a vision. But I don't have an opportunity like that." Yes, you do and you do have something better than seeing the Lord in a vision. You have the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the Trinity, God Himself in your heart. And the Bible that has thousands of God's recorded promises in your hands. What else do you need?

Whether you are in the midst of the biggest trial in your life, or going through sickness that has no bright future, or financial crisis, or utter loneliness, or marital difficulties, or whatever-you-fill-the-blank, the Lord is with you. Stay close to Him and His Word. He will encourage you like He did to apostle Paul.

D. GOD'S PROTECTION THROUGH THE ROMAN PROCONSUL

Acts 18:12-17 When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, 13 saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." 14 And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. 15 But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters." 16 And he drove them from the judgment seat. 17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

The unbelieving Jews thought that they could make this Christian sect illegal through the Roman proconsul's order. But the Lord used this pagan government official to rule against the Jews so that they couldn't harass Paul and the fellow Christian believers in Corinth any longer.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Next time when the Holy Spirit tugs your heart to witness to a person, do not be concerned for anything or anyone. Just do it. He will take care of everything.

2) The darker the situation you are in, the brighter God's light that illuminates your heart and your path. Trust His faithfulness. He will NOT let you down.