

God is faithful

It's not always easy, but never give up

Acts 18:1-17

Faithfulness is a rare commodity. We live in a day of quick divorce, making a quick buck, broken contracts, deadbeat dads and dysfunctional families, in fact it would be fair to say that we are surprised when somebody actually follows through and keeps their promises.

I am sure all of us have had the experience of trusting someone who has let us down. Depending on how big the issue is, will depend on how much pain is felt. Because of the culture we live in, when we hear the promise in the Bible that, "God is faithful" (1 Cor. 10:13) we can sometimes treat it with a certain degree of suspicion. People let you down, so when people say that 'God is always faithful', can they be trusted?

Of course, there are times when it 'seems' as if even God has let us down. We feel disappointment with God. However when we break it down, the problem is always at our end, never at His end, God cannot be unfaithful! But that is a whole different message.

I have regularly said that it is not always easy following Jesus, but what I hope to conclude today is that 'we should never give up, because God is faithful'.

We have been going through Acts with the theme, the church on a mission, and are up to Acts 18. Actually Acts 18 is a bit boring, but smack in the middle are these two verses and it is these that I want to focus on. Well read from 1-17 so you get the context.

Read Acts 18:1-17

***18** Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome. ³Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.*

⁴Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, trying to convince the Jews and Greeks alike. ⁵And after Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul spent all his time preaching the word. He testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶But when they

opposed and insulted him, Paul shook the dust from his clothes and said, "Your blood is upon your own heads—I am innocent. From now on I will go preach to the Gentiles."

⁷Then he left and went to the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. ⁸Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and everyone in his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptized.

⁹One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! ¹⁰For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me." ¹¹So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God.

¹²But when Gallio became governor of Achaia, some Jews rose up together against Paul and brought him before the governor for judgment. ¹³They accused Paul of "persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to our law."

¹⁴But just as Paul started to make his defence, Gallio turned to Paul's accusers and said, "Listen, you Jews, if this were a case involving some wrongdoing or a serious crime, I would have a reason to accept your case. ¹⁵But since it is merely a question of words and names and your Jewish law, take care of it yourselves. I refuse to judge such matters."¹⁶And he threw them out of the courtroom.

¹⁷The crowd then grabbed Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him right there in the courtroom. But Gallio paid no attention.

God's servants all go through difficult times.

It is so easy to misunderstand what the faithfulness of God means. God's faithfulness does not mean that He exempts us from trials, Paul's life, and Jesus' own life, proves that. He doesn't exempt us, but rather that He sustains us.

Sometimes we put some of the heroes in the Bible on too high a pedestal. We wrongly imagine that they have not struggled with the things we struggle with. If we had to pick words to describe the apostle Paul, people would probably

say, “bold,” “fearless,” “courageous,” and “determined.” Chances are we would not think of words like “fearful,” “discouraged,” “distressed,” or “weak.” Yet when Paul describes how he felt during his early days in Corinth, which is where he is now in Acts 18, he uses the words “distress”, “weakness,” “fear,” and “much trembling”. (Not in Acts 18 but other books where Paul wrote about his time in Corinth, 1 Thess. 3:7, 1 Cor. 2:3).

Even though Paul was a giant in the faith, Paul struggled with the same emotions that we all struggle with.

Why was Paul feeling weak and fearful when he was in Corinth? Let’s quickly look back at some of the events leading up to his visit there, we looked at most of these events in earlier weeks.

- You may recall David McChesney’s message on the subject of being ‘led by the Spirit’, that when he wanted to go into the province of Asia, but the Holy Spirit would not let him.
- Then he tried to go into Bithynia, but again, “the Spirit of Jesus did not permit him” (16:6, 7).
- Then, in the midst of these puzzling hindrances, he got the vision of the Macedonian man, and so they concluded that the Lord was calling them to go there. But things had not gone smoothly.
- In Philippi Paul and Silas were falsely accused, unjustly beaten, and thrown into the stocks in jail.
- From there they went to Thessalonica, but after a short time there, the Jews raised an uproar and they had to flee to Berea.
- The same thing happened there and Paul had to flee to Athens.
- In Athens, Paul met with ridicule and minimal response, which may have been more difficult than outright opposition.
- And so he left there and travelled alone the 80km to Corinth.

If that’s what happens when you are led by the spirit – I think we have got some stuff to learn. Today we seem to be only led by the spirit into good times, not trouble –is there something wrong with our theology?!!!

So Paul was struggling when he arrived in Corinth.

Corinth

Corinth is situated on an isthmus in southern Greece that made it a prosperous commercial crossroads. In Paul’s day, there were about 200,000 residents from

all over the Roman Empire. It was a popular place, partly because it housed the Temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, which had 1,000 prostitutes that plied their trade under the banner of “religion.” The city was so notorious for its immorality, that in the fifth century B.C., the Greeks coined a verb, “to Corinthize,” that meant to commit sexual immorality.

So Paul arrived in Corinth and had run out of money and so he had to find work. Being trained as a tentmaker, he found a Jewish tentmaker named Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, and stayed with them and began to work. This was the first time in his missionary journeys that he had to work at his trade to support himself. We don’t know whether Aquila and Priscilla had become Christians during their stay in Rome or whether Paul led them to Christ.

As usual, every Sabbath Paul went to the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks, trying to persuade them that Jesus is the Messiah (18:4), but this wasn’t easily accepted, in fact opposition was building.

Things were tough for Paul. 1 Thess. 3:1-8 tells us he was anxious about the well-being of the new believers back in Thessalonica. And possibly Paul may not have fully recovered from the beating that he had received in Philippi. So the spiritual concerns and discouragement about his ministry, and the constant opposition, and the loneliness, and the physical pain and weariness, and the lack of funds, were all weighing on Paul. And this is Paul being led by the Spirit!!

But as we know when you are feeling down, it’s good to hang out with your mates and for Paul a breath of fresh air blew in when Silas and Timothy turned up in Corinth. They brought good news about the strength of the churches in Macedonia. They also brought a generous gift from the church in Philippi (Phil. 4:10-14; 2 Cor. 11:9). But, in the synagogue the Jews continue to oppose him.

Paul spent all his time preaching the word. He testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶But when they opposed and insulted him, Paul shook the dust from his clothes and said, “Your blood is upon your own heads—I am innocent. From now on I will go preach to the Gentiles.” (18:6).

So Paul stomps out of the Synagogue, and I don’t know if this is God’s sense of humour or not, but the Lord opened an opportunity for Paul to continue ministering right next door in the home of Titius Justus, a new Gentile believer.

Despite the challenges, some good things happened and many of the Corinthians were believing and being baptized (18:7-8). But there was also a nagging fear that made Paul's insides churn. He could clearly see the pattern: He preached to the Jews and saw some initial response but the Jews who didn't respond grew jealous and stirred up opposition.

It appears Paul may have been on the verge of leaving Corinth before he got forced out. Things were not going well at all, he was afraid and discouraged.

God is faithful toward His servants.

You may be wondering how I am going to turn this around into being about the faithfulness of God? Well here we go – following Jesus is not just about things going well – it is also amongst the difficult times God is still at work and we still see God's faithfulness but sometimes only with hindsight. In our day to day living we need to be a bit slower in doubting the faithfulness of God.

1. God is faithful to raise up godly friends (18:1-4).

- We don't know how Paul met Aquila and Priscilla.
 - Maybe he was answering a help wanted ad! Paul's lack of funds put him in the job market. And so God providentially brought these three together.
 - They later went with Paul to Ephesus, where they hosted a church in their home (1 Cor. 16:19).
 - Eventually they returned to Rome, where they also hosted a church.
 - Paul says that they risked their lives for his sake, and that they were appreciated by all of the Gentile churches (Rom. 16:3-5).
 - In one of the last verses that Paul wrote before he was executed, (2 Tim. 4:19) he sent greetings to this couple, who had become his lifelong friends.
- Paul also was encouraged when Silas and Timothy re-joined him in Corinth (Acts 18:5). They brought an encouraging word about Paul's new Christian friends in Thessalonica and Philippi.

God did not design us to go it alone. We desperately need each other, even though sometimes we annoy each other! In Christ we are family. All ministry should be team ministry, where we complement one another, pray for one another, and bear one another's burdens.

If you don't have a small group of godly friends that you occasionally hang out with you are missing out on a vital part of the Christian journey!

2. God is faithful to provide funds for his work (18:5).

I recognise I am treading on dangerous ground here, it is easy to push people's buttons when talking about money.

Paul needed money, but did not hire a fundraising group to meet his needs for personal support. In fact he would primarily make known other peoples' needs (2 Cor. 8 & 9). But when he ran out of personal funds, he didn't become a televangelist, ask for a hand out from the church - he rolled up his sleeves, went back to his trade and started making tents until the Lord provided support.

Today's tentmakers.

There has been a surge of interest in tentmaking ministry over the past 2-3 decades. Situations today often require tentmakers for the same two reasons that Paul had: economic necessity and credibility.

In certain situations/countries, there is no trust concerning Christian workers. Sometimes a work cannot afford to support a worker. This is true of churches in poorer areas and in predominantly non-Christian cultures.

WE need to realise that full time ministry is not the ultimate vocation. A secular job is not an inconvenience, but the God-given context in which Christians live out the gospel in a wholesome, non-judgmental way, demonstrating personal integrity, doing quality work and developing caring relationships.

At the moment in NZ, especially amongst young adult Christians there is a move to take jobs in difficult areas of their own community, such as the inner city or a lower socio economic area, so that they can witness in those places. Thus, when challenging Christians to missions, which we should all be doing, we can also place before them the possibility of going as tentmakers to needy places.

God will provide but we might need to use our imagination and our initiative, not just expect a handout.

3. God is faithful even in the face of opposition (18:6-8).

Even though Paul faced strong opposition, God graciously brought several people to salvation, including the man living next door to the synagogue and the synagogue leader and his family. Many Gentiles from corrupt backgrounds

also got saved (18:7-8). The church in Corinth ended up being a pretty colourful bunch of people - Paul lists former fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, and swindlers as making up the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Where sin abounded, God's grace super-abounded (Rom. 5:20)!

We need to be praying for God to use this church and to use you and me to lead people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. If we are not reaching out to the lost, we have forgotten our mission.

If, like Paul at this time in his life, you're struggling with discouragement, nothing will encourage you more than to see someone you witness to take a step closer to Jesus. If God could save the corrupt Corinthians, He can save anyone in NZ!

And so God said to Paul, and I believe that this is a word for us here in OBC, here in NZ, and yes a word for me specifically.

"Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! ¹⁰For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me."

Just when Paul needed it, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and encouraged him: "Do not be afraid, but keep witnessing, keep telling your story; for I am with you."

Pray

To conclude I want to play a video they shares the gospel in 'plain speak', It 5 mins long and usually you can't take that long when talking one on one but it might give you some ideas of how you might be able to tell your story when the time comes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jV2qMnKz1LI>