

Lurgan Baptist Church: 29:11:2011

Reading: Acts 18:1-17

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

28. IT'S ALWAYS TOO SOON TO QUIT

A man was shovelling snow from his driveway when two boys carrying snow shovels approached him. "Shovel your snow, Mister?" one of them asked, "Only two dollars." Puzzled the man replied, "Can't you see that I'm doing it myself?" "Sure," said the enterprising lad, "that's why we asked. We get most of our business from people who are half through and feel like quitting." Dr. V. Raymond Edman used to say to the students at Wheaton College, "**It's always too soon to quit.**" And Charles Spurgeon reminded his London congregation, "By perseverance, the snail reached the ark." Corinth, with its 200,000 people, would not be the easiest city in which to start a church, and yet that's where Paul went after leaving Athens. And he went alone. The going was tough, but Paul did not give up, even though he was passing through the throes of discouragement.

Paul discouraged. Yes. My a little appreciated truth about the ministry is that pastors and missionaries, perhaps more than other believers, are subject to discouragement. Charles Spurgeon explains that, "Good men are promised tribulation in this world, and

ministers may expect a larger share than others, that they may learn sympathy with the Lord's suffering people, and so may be fitting shepherds of an ailing flock." My some of God's choicest servant's have undergone times of severe despondency and despair. Burdened with the weight of a rebellious, grumbling people, **Moses** cried out to the Lord, "Wherefore hast Thou afflicted Thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in Thy sight, that Thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in Thy sight: and let me not see my wretchedness." (Num 11:11-15)

Following Israel's defeat at Ai, **Joshua** said, "Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan?" (Jos 7:7) Do you recall **Elijah**? He knew what it was to plunge from the height of success to the pit of despair. Following his dramatic victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20) he fled into the wilderness in fear of Jezebel. There he despaired of life and said, "It is enough, now O Lord, take away my life: for I am not better than my fathers." (1 Kings 19:4) Do you recall Jonah? After witnessing a great revival in the city of Nineveh, Jonah went to the outskirts of that city and said, "O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me: for it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:3)

My have you ever been there ? Depressed, despondent, defeated, disheartened, ready to quit ? Wanting the Lord to end it all ? I tell you **Paul** must have felt despondent as he walked the fifty odd miles to Corinth. Since coming to Europe he had suffered a terrible beating in Philippi, civil rejection in Thessalonica and Berea, and indifference in Athens. We get a glimmer of how Paul felt when he arrived in Corinth in the opening verses of (Ch 2) of his first letter to the Corinthians. He says, “ *And I brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.* ” (1 Cor 2:1-3) That last line suggests a man who had been through the wringer. Corinth was a low point in Paul’s life physically, emotionally, financially and perhaps even spiritually. He had arrived there after many weeks of travel, ministry and tribulation.

Perhaps as he was walking those fifty three miles to Corinth he was thinking. “ Why am I doing this ? ” You see, even the great apostle might have hit lonely stretches in his life where he wondered if all his effort was really making a difference. What was getting Paul down ? Well, like the Old Testament prophet Elijah, Paul had been under excruciating tension for a long time, and he was losing his ability to **rebound**. Paul was still reeling from his multiple encounters in recent months. He probably had not sufficient time to recover from his beating. He was tired. And he now faced the depressing moral ambience of Corinth. My for 500 years the expression “ *to Corinthianize*, ” meant to be

sexually impure. Corinth was the Vanity Fair of the ancient world. Every night a thousand prostitutes descended the Acrocorinth to ply their trade in the worship of Aphrodite. My one could buy anything in Corinth if he had the money. Homosexuality was rampant. When Paul wrote Romans (Ch 1) he was describing what he saw in Corinth. What a contemporary ring this has, “ *For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature, and likewise also the men leaving the natural use of the women burned in their lust one toward another: men with men working that which is unseemly.* ” (Rom 1:26-27) And into this city of Corinth walks Paul overcome by all the sordid sights and sounds. Certain questions kept haunting him, “ ***How can these people be reached ? What can I do ? Why should they listen to me ?*** ” You see, if there had been a **culture** shock in Athens, now Paul experienced a **moral** shock in Corinth.

It’s sweat and perfume and grit smothered Paul’s righteous soul, and he became discouraged. Remembering his past experiences, he knew what would happen to him in Corinth, and the apostle, as great a servant of Christ as he was, became discouraged, fearful, and insecure. But the “ *God of all comfort*, ” (2 Cor 1:3) who “ *comforteth those that are cast down*, ” did not leave Paul in his downtrodden condition. The Lord would not leave his tired and discouraged servant alone. For as Paul ministered in Corinth the Lord gave him just the encouragement’s he needed and these same encouragements are available

to us today. Notice for example there was,

(1) COMPANIONSHIP: PAUL AND HIS FRIENDS

“What is a friend?” asked Aristotle the ancient sage. His response was “A single soul dwelling in two bodies.” My ... everyone agrees that Paul was a great Christian and a great missionary evangelist, but how much would Paul have accomplished **alone**? Friends like Aquilla and Priscilla, Silas and Timothy, and the generous believers in Macedonia, made it possible for Paul to serve the Lord effectively. His Christian friends new and old, encouraged him at a time when he needed it the most. You see Paul experienced,

(a) THE PRIVILEGE OF FELLOWSHIP:

At just the right time, God gave Paul just the right people to welcome him. You see, God knew that Paul needed someone else to shoulder the formidable burdens that he carried. Aquila means “eagle,” Priscilla is a diminutive form of Prisca, which is the name of one of the great families of Rome. She was probably related to this family in some way. Whatever the connection, she must have been a gifted lady, for in half the occurrences of their names she is mentioned first, which is highly unusual. ***Possibly she is mentioned first because she was the more prominent of the two in service to the church.*** (Rom 16:3 1Cor 16:19

2 Tim 4:19) They had probably been converted to Christ in Rome by Jews who returned from Pentecost in Jerusalem. One thing is absolutely certain, since

they had come into Paul’s life, they were a great encouragement to the apostle. In the final chapter of Romans Paul calls them his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus,” saying that they “*risks their lives,*” for him. (Rom 16:3) They were close friends, towers of strength. Hudson Taylor had reached a cross-roads, actually it was more like a dead end. He was only 23 years of age and for less than 2 years he had been working as a missionary in China. But that time had been marked by a growing disillusionment with his missionary society and discouragement caused by criticism from his fellow missionaries. Then there came two more blows. His girl in England wrote to him telling him she did not love him and an order came from the missionary council telling him to stop his work in a certain town. “*My dear Mother,*” he wrote, “*my heart is so sad, sad, sad, I do not know what to do.*”

At that stage God graciously gave Hudson Taylor a friend, a Scottish missionary twenty years older named William Burns. Burns sensed in Taylor a kindred spirit and a need for a friend. He encouraged Taylor to rest in the Lord and trust in His goodness, guidance, and resources. For seven months they travelled, preached and prayed together and those months left an indelible mark on Hudson Taylor. William Burns was not the only reason that Taylor became a great man of God but he was an indispensable factor. My ... is there someone this ... who stands in need of your fellowship? The pastor of a prestigious church in the U.S.A. said, “*I am a very lonely man ... the only interest the membership has in me is what I do, I don't know a single person who cares for me for what I am not just*

for what I do.” (a) And then he experienced,

(b) THE PROVISION OF FINANCE:

Look if will at (18:5) The arrival of his colleagues did a number of things for Paul. It relieved him of the anxiety he felt for his Thessalonian converts.

(1 Thes 3:6-10) A gift of money he received at this time from his friends in Macedonia possibly from Philippi (2 Cor 11:8 Phil 4:15) enabled to gave up his secular employment and devote himself full time to his missionary work. Incidentally, Paul was not above earning money as occasion required to support himself and even his colleagues in the ministry. Is that not something that we need to hear today ? Listen, those who are using full time Christian service as an easy touch are bringing dishonour to the Lord’s name. My Paul was not afraid to support himself and neither should we would be. Now as a result of these things, Paul threw himself with even greater zeal into the task of winning Jews to Jesus. Now more boldly than ever he urged the Jews to consider the claims of Jesus to be Israel’s true and only Messiah. The expression “ *was pressed in the spirit,*” can be rendered “ *was engrossed in his witness.*”

My it totally absorbed him. He went at it with a single-minded abandon. The gift that he had received from Macedonia allowed him to minister full time in Corinth and not rely on tent making for support. You see Paul had substantial reasons to be encouraged. He met Aquila and Priscilla, lived with them, worked with them, was reunited with his co-workers, received a love gift from Macedonia. My is our God not a

God of encouragement in Paul’s life and in ours if we wait patiently for Him to meet our needs. So there was, (a) (b) and there was,

(c) THE PRESENCE OF FRIENDS:

Not only, the presence of **new** friends, but there was reunion with **old** friends. Look if will at (18:5) Some time later when Paul was journeying toward Rome, Luke tells us this. “ *when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns, whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage.*” (28:15) The presence of God’s people shot encouragement into the soul of Paul. Tell me: are you an encouragement to God’s servants in the work of the Lord ? Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “ *God evidently does not intend us all to be rich or powerful or great, but He does intend us all to be friends.*” It was Paul himself who said, “ *Bear ye one anther’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*” (Gal 6:2) Humanly speaking, there would have been no church in Corinth were it not for the devotion and service of so many different people. (1)

(2) APOSTLESHIP: PAUL AND HIS WORK

Now Jewish opposition had forced Paul to leave Thessalonica and Berea, but in Corinth, it only made him determined to stay there and get the job done. **It is always too soon to quit.** Like the undaunted Christopher Columbus Paul could write in his journal, “ *Today we sailed on.*” As we have noted already the gifts from the Macedonians brought by Silas and

Timothy allowed Paul to stop working in leather. The phrase “*tentmaker*,” in (18:5) could refer to leather worker, a trade that included the making of tents which were often made out of leather. You see, it was customary for all Jewish boy’s even rabbis’ sons to learn their father’s trade. Paul had no doubt learned from his father to work with this skill. But when “*Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*” (A.T.) You see,

(a) THERE WAS FAITHFULNESS:

For week after week, Paul spends his time and energy between working and witnessing. Eventually, relief comes, as Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia, bringing gifts. which allows him to quit tent-making and begin ministering to the Jews full time. (a) Do you recall what Paul says later to this very church ? “*It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*” (1 Cor 4:2) My are we faithful in our witnessing ? Just plugging away, week after week. The Jews were less than receptive to the idea of Jesus as the Christ, for (19:6) says “*And when they opposed*”

(b) THERE WAS FEARLESSNESS:

What is Paul doing here ? Giving up in frustration ? Giving in to his temper ? Neither, actually. He is merely following Christ’s counsel from Matthew (Ch 7) where the Saviour says, “*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn*

again and rend you.” (Matt 7:6) Paul had done all he could for the Jews, and still they rejected the precious pearl of the gospel. So, with a clear conscience, he very practically said, “*That’s it.*” and turned to the Gentiles. Now two interesting Old Testament images are found in (18:6) To shake out one’s garment was an act of judgment that said, “*You have had your opportunity, but now it’s over.*” Today we might say, that we were washing our hands of a situation. (Neh 5:13 13:51

Matt 10:14) While Paul never ceased witnessing to the Jews, his primary calling was to evangelise the Gentiles. (13:46-48 28:28) To have **blood on your hands**, means that you bear the responsibility for another’s death because you were not faithful to warn him.

(Ezek 3:17-21) But to have **blood on your head**, means that you are to blame for your own judgment. You had the opportunity to be saved, but you turned it down. (Josh 2:19)

My Paul’s hands were clean (20:26) because he had been faithful to declare the message of the gospel. The Jews had their blood on their own head’s because they rejected God’s truth. Now at this time, God brought another friend into Paul’s life, a God-fearing Gentile by the name of Titus Justus. His name indicates that he was a Roman, and since Romans often had three names some Bible students think that his full name was Gaius Titus Justus and that he was the “*Gaius my host*,” referred to in (Rom 16:23 1 Cor 1:14) The connection between Gaius and Crispus in (18:7-8)

and in (1 Cor 1:14) is certainly significant. You see, Paul departed from the synagogue and began using the house of Titus Justus, as his preaching station, right next to the synagogue and,

(c) ***THERE WAS FRUITFULNESS:***

For the chief ruler of the synagogue was saved, indeed his whole family turned to the Lord (10:24 44, 16:15, 34) My can you imagine how that must have stirred the Jewish population in Corinth ? Moreover, “ *many of the Corinthians, hearing believed, and were baptised.*”

(18:8) I mean here was Paul somewhat discouraged and disheartened in Corinth and how does God encourage him ? By allowing him to see souls saved. Has that been the same in your ministry ? I tell you there have been times when I have been ready to call it quits and then the Lord comes in and gives me the joy of pointing a soul to Christ. Now when you examine Paul’s ministry in Corinth, you will see that he was fulfilling the Lord’s commission given in (Matt 28:19-20) Paul came to Corinth (“ *Go,* ”) he won sinners to Christ (“ *make disciples,* ”) he baptised, and he taught them. He even experienced the assurance of the Lord’s, “ *Lo, I am with thee always.* ” (18:9-10)

I mean do you see the same pattern being repeated time and again in the early church ? “ *Many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptised.* ” Do you see the simplicity of it all ? You hear the gospel, you trust the Saviour, you obey the command to be baptised. Now what’s your problem ? Do you not want to obey your Lord ? To walk in simple obedience to

Him. Now although Dr. Luke does not give us the details I get the impression that between (18:8 & 9) the situation in Corinth became especially difficult and dangerous. The Jews were no doubt furious at Paul’s success and did everything possible to silence him and get rid of him. Paul may have been thinking about leaving the city when the Lord came to Him and gave him the assurance that He needed. You see there was not only (1) (2) there was:

(3) FELLOWSHIP: PAUL AND HIS GOD

Now this is one of six visions Paul received in Acts (9:12 16:9 22:17 23:11 27:23) all coming at crucial points in his ministry. My the Lord Jesus touched as He is “ *with the feeling of our infirmities,* ” (Heb 4:15) came at this time to his faithful, but discouraged servant. When we feel the unrelenting presence of evil, when we sense that the forces of darkness are sending troops to defeat us, when we feel that our finest hour is about to give way to our lowest, there is an antidote for our hopelessness. What did the Lord tell Paul ? Well, He brought to Paul,

(a) A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT:

“ *Be not afraid,* ” “ *Fear not,* ” (18:9) My has fear been whispering its dismal messages in your ear lately ? Fear does its best haunting late at night, doesn’t it ? What are your late night fears telling you ? Paul had given way to fear and discouragement even though he was experiencing spiritual success ? From Paul’s perspective, the immediate future was perfectly

predictable. Soon there would be a riot, and he would be beaten. He was like a boxer who knows what he is coming when he answers the bell. Poor Paul, was worrying about troubles he was not facing yet, a terrible habit in which we all engage. When Lincoln was on his way to Washington to be inaugurated, he spent some time in New York with Horace Greely, and told him an anecdote which was meant to be answer to the question everybody was asking, are we really to have

Civil War ? In his circuit riding days Lincoln and his companions, riding to the next session of court had crossed many swollen rivers. But the Fox River was still ahead of them, and they said one to another, " *If these streams give us so much trouble, how shall we get over the Fox River ?*" When darkness fell, they stopped for the night at a log tavern, where they fell in with the Methodist presiding elder of the district who rode through the country in all kinds of weather and knew all about the Fox River. They gathered about him and asked him about the present state of the river. " *Oh yes,*" replied the circuit rider, " *I know all about the Fox River. I have crossed it often and undertsand it well. But I have one fixed rule with regard to the Fox River I never cross it till I reach it.*"

My what a rule, easy to remember, not so easy to keep. Are we not all professionals when it comes to borrowing trouble ? We feel harassed as we wait for something disastrous and unpleasant to happen. We just know that social event is going to be a flop. What if it rains on our day off ? We are sure so-and - so will put the wrong interpretation on our words.

My we go through a thousand trials we are never meant to undergo, and probably never will. The fact that God encouraged Paul meant that God loved and cared for His servant. Indeed John reminds us " There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear." (1 Jn 4:18) Is this Gods Word to you this ? Fear not, stop worrying about tomorrow, stop borrowing trouble because you are divinely loved and God's love is enough. (a)

(b) A WORD OF ENABLEMENT:

" *But speak and hold not thy peace*" (18:9) Had Paul's fear made him afraid ? I mean every time Paul opened his mouth and spoke he got in trouble, jail, beatings, persecution, and the like. My it's to Paul's credit and our ongoing edification that Paul obeyed and kept ministering. Lloyd Ogilvie writes, " *Often when I feel I have been least efficient, people have been helped most effectively. It has taken me a long time to learn that the lower my resistances are and the less self-consciousness I have, the more the Word of God comes through.*" Do you know something ? Weakness is the secret strength of God's most effective servants and the indispensable element of potent preaching. If you are feeling weak and fearful, praise God, for now is the time to speak and not be silent, relying on the Lord to make His power perfect in your weakness. (2 Cor 12:9-10) Then whatever you do, whatever is accomplished for Christ, all the glory will go to God.

(c) A WORD OF ENRICHMENT:

" For I am with thee and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee," (18:10) My Paul was assured of the Lord's **Presence:** God says, " *Do not fear keep going I am with you.*" John Wesley's dying words, his very last words were, " *The best of all is, God is with us.*" When he was a young man the famous preacher G. Campbell Morgan used to read the Bible each week to two elderly women. One evening, when he finished reading the closing words of (Matt Ch 28) Morgan said to the ladies, " *Isn't that a wonderful promise ?*" And one of them replied, " *Young man, that is not a promise it is a certainty.*" But Paul was also assured of the Lord's **Protection:** " *And no man shall set on thee to hurt thee ,*" (18:10) This had not been true in previous months, for Paul had suffered terribly, but for the present at least, no-one could do ultimate harm to the apostle Paul. This was a word that brought enrichment to his soul. But notice it was not only (a) (b) (c)

(d) A WORD OF ENLIGHTENMENT:

For God assured His apostle, " *I have much people in this city.*" Paul's work would not be fruitless. Some of the Corinthians were tired of Tinsel Town. The fleshly pleasures had lost their attraction. Some were suffering deep guilt and an awful emptiness of soul. They were ready to receive Christ. These people, according to Paul's other writings included Erastus, Gaius (Rom 16:23) Stephanos, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. (1 Cor 16:17) My Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months. For him that was like putting down

roots. It was not long before there were many believers. For Paul's work was not in vain. My do you recognise that your work is not in vain in the Lord ? I tell you over this troubled town and city of ours, the Holy Spirit broods and the Lord says, " *I have much people in this city.*" Paul's Jewish opponents had watched in frustrated rage as more and more people came to faith in Christ. Finally, the bubble burst and Paul experienced,

(4) HARDSHIP: PAUL AND HIS ENEMIES

You see whenever God is blessing a ministry, you can expect increased opposition as well as increased opportunities. Paul when writing to the Corinthians said, " *For a great and effectual door is opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*" (1 Cor 16:9) Opportunity, and then opposition. Look at,

(a) THE ASSAULT:

In (18:12) The judgment seat was a large, raised stone platform that stood in the agora (market place) in front of the residence of the proconsul and served as a public court where he tried cases. The Jews hoped for a favourable verdict from Gallio, which could then be cited as a precedent in other places where the gospel was preached. They began the proceedings with,

(b) THE ACCUSATION:

" This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law." (18:13) Now this charge had far-reaching

implications. Had Gallio ruled in the Jews favour, the gospel would have been banned not only in Corinth but also throughout the Empire. Gallio, however was not to be so easily duped for look at,

(c) THE ATTITUDE:

That was adopted. (18:14-16) Gallio threw the case out. But that was not the end of the matter for,

(d) THE AFTERMATH:

Was this. The Greeks who were witnessing the scene got hold of Sosthenes, the man who replaced Crispus as ruler of the synagogue, and beat him right before the eyes of the proconsul. This may have been because he was unsuccessful as leader of the Jews in prosecuting the case against Paul. Whatever the reason, it was certainly a flagrant display of anti-Semitism, but Gallio looked the other way. If this is the same Sosthenes mentioned by Paul in (1 Cor 1:1) then he too got saved and the Jews had to find another ruler for their synagogue.

My how strange and wonderful are the providence's of God. The Jews tried to force the Roman proconsul to declare the Christian faith illegal, but Gallio ended up doing just the opposite. As far he was concerned, Paul and his companions had as much right as the Jews to practice their faith and share it with others. And for a time Paul and his followers enjoyed more freedom than before.

My can't you imagine that as Paul looked back on his experiences in Corinth **he was glad that he didn't quit.** Tell me, are you discouraged and ready to quit ? Are you fearful because of an uncertain future ? Do you feel alone ? Do you feel that your ministry is futile ? Then the Lord has a message for you, "***Do not be afraid. Stop borrowing trouble. Look to me. I love you. Keep ministering. Believe that I am with you and that I will give you all the protection you need. Believe that your life and ministry will bear fruit.***" Is this God's Word to you this, "***Be not afraid but speak, for I am with thee I have much people in this city.***"