

Acts 18:1-17

Stop Being Afraid and Do not be Silent

Introduction: Acts is the history of the earliest Christians. It's authentic Christianity - it's how we, 2,000 years later, know the real thing. As the church in 2017 we need to continually recalibrate ourselves to God's Word and to authentic Christianity and there is no better place to do that than to look at the first Christians in the book of Acts. We've been following the outline of Acts as God's good news of making everything new through Jesus makes it's way from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Paul has just left Athens and the philosophers on Mars Hill. He is still alone at this time as he makes his way west, from Athens, to the city of Corinth.

Corinth was a major city of the Roman Empire, at an important crossroads of trade and travel; it was also a city notorious for its pride, hedonism, and immorality.

Even in Paul's day, Corinth was already an ancient city. It was a commercial center with two harbors. The population was probably somewhere around 750,000 similar in size and population to San Francisco (next to Ephesus probably the greatest commercial center in the ancient world). Because of it's rich commerce it brought people of trade from all over the ancient world. Corinth was also a city with a remarkable reputation for licentious living, especially in issues of sexual immorality. In classical Greek, to act like a Corinthian was to practice all kinds of sexual immoral acts, and a "Corinthian companion" was a prostitute.

The city of Corinth was rich in religious practices. There city contained a large temple to the worship of Aphrodite (Ashtoreth) the greek goddess of love. This temple employed over a thousand prostitutes (priestesses) for the sexual practices of this religion. The cult was dedicated to the glorification or deification of sex.

The god Melicertes was also worshipped by the Corinthians as the god of navigation He was the god of sailors and merchants. This cult religion had to do with prosperity in business and trade. The Corinthians worshipped success.

There was also a temple to the god Apollo. Apollo was known as the god of music, art, and poetry. He was also the male ideal of beauty. Nude

sculptures of Apollo were all over the city, displaying his “manhood and fertility” this therefore encouraged his worshippers to physical displays of devotion with the god’s beautiful boys. Corinth was therefore a centre of Pedaphilia and homosexual practices.

Corinth was not so different from our modern American cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Miami, and New York. Large metropolitan port cities centered around business, filled with worshippers of sex, prosperity, money, the arts and the human body. Largely populated, wealthy, commercially minded, and sex obsessed.

Paul, when writing later to the church in Corinth reminds them, **“And I, when I came to you... I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.”**

Paul doesn’t tell us why he felt this way, but there are a few things we can gather from the narrative of Acts.

Paul had not been experiencing the same successes of his first missionary journey this time around. Every where he went the gospel was met with strong opposition. Paul had been driven out of every city since Philippi. In the last two cities his time was cut short, because of violent opposition to the Gospel and Paul in particular, he had to be sent away. He had been in the idol smothered, oppressive city of Athens all alone, and now he makes the journey to Corinth all on his own (A sixteen hour journey on foot). I think Paul was going through a season of discouragement, possible doubt, definitely fear. Now he comes to the city of Corinth and it is aggressively hedonistic and proud of it, it is aggressively sexually debased and proud of it, it is wise, artistic, and savvy, and it is proud of it. And I think that this was intimidating to Paul - so much so that he would even describe himself as weak, fearful and trembling...

We’re told that Paul did in Corinth what he did in every city that there was a Synagogue - **“he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶ And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the**

Gentiles.”⁷ And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.⁸ Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

At this point and time, in Paul’s experience, this is the moment where he waits to be dragged into a court, stoned by the mob, ran out of town by those in the pagan idol industry, or the Jews opposing the gospel to the Gentiles...He’s expecting the other shoe to drop, it’s that calm before the storm, the feeling of dread... yet the unexpected happens to Paul.. Jesus appears to him and speaks to him.

“And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent,¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

This appearance of Jesus, along with his words of comfort, strengthen Paul so that he stays there in Corinth for a year and a half teaching the word of God among them.

No doubt some of us have felt or do feel the same as Paul the Apostle felt - we wonder how we can continue in our christian walk, or in our proclaiming and living out the Gospel. Maybe our cultures agenda seems so pervasive and impossible to resist. Maybe it’s the pride and apparent contentment of our culture as it continually mocks and rejects the good news about Jesus. I think these words of Jesus are truths and words that we need to be reminded of so that we can be strengthened in our task to be the Church in the city of Santa Rosa.

Eugene Peterson says - “the Holy Spirit formed (the church) to be a colony of heaven in the country of death. ... Church is the core element in the strategy of the Holy Spirit for providing human witness and physical presence to the Jesus-inaugurated kingdom of God in this world. It is not that kingdom complete, but it is a witness to that kingdom....Church is an appointed gathering of named people in particular places who practice a life of resurrection in a world in which death gets the biggest headlines. ...

The practice of resurrection is an intentional, deliberate decision to believe and participate in resurrection life, life out of death, life that trumps death, life that is the last word, Jesus life.” - Eugene Peterson, Practicing Resurrection

We need to be reminded not only of our purpose as the Church but the power and presence behind that purpose and this text does just that.

How does Jesus strengthen Paul?

1. “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you”

1. It may be a surprise to you to know that, “**Do not be afraid**” is the most frequent commandment in all of the Bible. Which means that we can conclude that one great purpose and intent of the work of the Gospel is that we would not fear anything, because we have in the person of God, through the work of Jesus Christ - all comfort, protection, preservation, love and acceptance. If we have God, we have everything. As the Psalmist says, “**The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?**” - Psalm 27:1
2. This command is not just a command to stop being afraid, it is a command to recognize the reason to not be afraid, As Jesus says to Paul - “**I am with you!**”
 1. Just as Paul has this assurance of Jesus’ presence, power and preservation so each Christian does also.
 2. Remember that in our first study of Acts we saw that the Ascension of Jesus to the presence of God the Father meant -
 1. **Absolute presence,**
 2. **Absolute power,**
 3. **and Absolute persuasion.**
3. **Absolute Presence**
 1. Jesus Promised the Disciples that when he went away he would send another comforter - the Holy Spirit who would be with us always and would guide us into all truth. Jesus actually says that if he doesn’t go away (The Ascension) he cannot send the Spirit.
 2. **By sending the Holy Spirit it means that no matter what happens, even if we are locked in the deepest darkest dungeon, Jesus is still with us, even through death.**

3. “An awareness of the resurrected Christ banishes meaninglessness - the dreaded sense that all our life experiences are disconnected and useless. It helps us to see our lives as one piece and reveals a design never perceived before. He goes on, “A hard day, yes. Rattled and unglued, yes. Unable to cope, no. How does the life-giving Spirit of the risen Lord manifest himself on days like that? In our willingness to stand fast, our refusal to run away, and escape into self destructive behavior. Resurrection power enables us to engage in the savage confrontation with untamed emotions, to accept the pain, receive it, take it onboard, however acute it may be. And in the process we discover that we are not alone, that we can stand fast in the awareness of present risen-ness and so become fuller, richer, deeper disciples....The Lord might lead us into things we believe unbearable..and yet it may happen in these most desperate trials of our human existence that beyond any rational explanation, we may feel a nail scarred hand clutching ours.” - Brennan Manning
4. Those who have placed their trust in Jesus have the absolute presence of Jesus with them wherever they go, even through death. As Jesus said, “**behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**”

4. **Absolute Power** - The ascension means that Jesus is on the throne of absolute power in the universe and that he controls all things.
 1. This is what Jesus tells Paul, “No one will touch you to hurt you.”
 2. God’s control over all things is a huge biblical theme seen in stories like Joseph, and ultimately seen in Jesus -how God uses everything in our lives, good and bad, for his ultimate glory and our good. Which means that we don’t have to fear anything because God is in control of all things. A theme again that we’ll see throughout the book of Acts - the Kingdom of God is an unstoppable force, nothing can stop it, not the wicked political schemes of Herod or the Jewish leaders, not the beheading of the Apostles, not the prejudice and racism of the Judaizers, not the lynching mobs, not the philosophies or pride of man, not sin, not fear, not imprisonment, not shipwreck or vipers, or stoning.. nothing can stop the promises of God, in Jesus, from getting out to the world he so dearly loves!

5. Absolute Persuasion

1. When Jesus ascended to the Father not only did he go to the place of absolute power he also went to the seat of judgment - the cosmic court room if you will. In ancient times the seat of power was also the seat of judgment - the division of powers is a unique and relatively new form of government.
 2. The scripture tell us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God and that he ever lives to make intercession for us.
 3. Listen to Hebrews 7, **“He is able to save to the uttermost^[b] those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.” - Hebrews 7:25-26**
 4. And 1 John 2 tells us, **“if anyone (christian) does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”**
 5. The ascension means that Jesus is 24/7 in the presence of God, the righteous judge, (The cosmic court room) pleading our case - that we are guiltless of sin, and that we are clothed in Christ righteousness. Jesus work on the cross, means, that those who believe in him, their debt of sin has been paid in full, and the righteous life that Jesus lived has been credited to their account. God now sees you as absolutely spotless and beautiful in Jesus.
 6. You see justification by faith in Jesus’ work means that the only one in the universe that matters (God) thinks you are amazing, spotless, and beautiful.. What does it matter what other people think about you? Only once this truth has sunk into your heart (by the working of the Holy Spirit) and freed you from the opinions and judgments of others, or even your opinion of yourself, will you be free and truly living under the rule of Jesus as King.
2. **“Go on speaking and do not be silent - for I have many in this city who are my people.”**

1. This second command is predicated on the first. It is only because Jesus is present with us where ever we go, that his power preserves us, and his blood justifies us - that we need not fear or hold back the truth of the Gospel. He who has Jesus, has all things, all joy, all hope, all security, all love and acceptance. The fact that Jesus is with us is a work of grace - meaning we did nothing to earn his presence, we can do nothing to lose it. it's a gift that accompanies salvation. See, Paul was called, as are we, to go on speaking and not be silent concerning the Gospel - the Good news of what God has done to rescue and redeem the world through Jesus Christ. This must be proclaimed, along with repentance and faith. That takes some boldness, no matter who you are...It is only through this truth that we can be set free to boldly speak and not be silent concerning the truth of Jesus and the gospel.
2. **Why must Paul speak and not be silent?** Because Jesus has many people in the city of Corinth. "Many people" is the term *Laos*, and it is used exclusively for God's people in the OT. God had many people in Corinth that he was going to rescue...
3. God did an amazing work of redemption and healing in the city of Corinth. Listen to what Paul says, **"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."**
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

1. Can you imagine what would have happened if Paul would have shrank back in fear over the overwhelming evil, pride and licentiousness of Corinth. What if Paul would have just left, or just kept silent about "hot topic issues". Probably nothing, nothing at all. Corinth would have been a city that went untouched by the gospel.. hundreds, even thousands, would never know the grace, forgiveness, acceptance and freedom that are found in Jesus alone..
2. We cannot be silent - We live in a time and place where many of the things that Christianity teaches are very unpopular and

opposed.. Christian views of sexuality and sexual morals are especially becoming increasingly unpopular among our society as well as in the Church.. But the truth is a Christian sexual ethic has never been easy and it has never been well-received. It is always contrary to what we as sinners want to do.

3. But "if we Christians are right about the universe, the sexual revolution cannot keep its promises. Unhinged sexual utopianism can only go so far before it leaves the ground around it burned over, like every other utopianism. We the Church, need to be ready, after all of this, to point a light to the older paths, toward water that can satisfy. We need to be a John 3:16 people in a John 4:16 world." - Russell Moore
4. Every person has been made in the image of God and has been created to glorify and enjoy him forever, and there will always be a disconnect, hopelessness, meaninglessness and despair to some degree or another until they find true rest and peace in God through Christ.

4. **How does God reach a city?**

1. Share about this verse in 2006.
2. He does it as his people are filled with his Spirit - The Knowledge and experience of his personal presence, power and redemption through Jesus.
3. But he also does it through a faithful presence.. A long obedience in the same direction. Paul stuck it out for a year and a half.. that was a long time for Paul to be in one place. It's through patient endurance, it's through faithfully loving people, and being there when the bottom falls out, and it will, that God will reach people in our city.
4. He does it through us speaking boldly and not being quiet about the only hope for the world. He does it through his people, graciously, yet boldly sharing the truth concerning Jesus through their lives and through their words... God has many people in this city therefore, we cannot be silent, we must go on. Of course it always comes back to what Jesus suffered for us, what he went through in order to make us children of God. Jesus didn't just face the fear of death, he faced death itself. He didn't just face rejection from people but rejection from his Father in

Heaven, in order that you and I could be accepted by God, so that we could be washed, sanctified and justified..

5. **How can we silent about him?**

1. God increase our love and awe of Jesus, for who he is and what he has done, so that it is greater than any love or comfort, that it is greater than any fear or consequence that might come from the culture around us.