Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Gospel in Vanity Fair, Part 1
Scripture: Acts 18:1-8
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Acts chapter 18, and this morning, we're going to begin our study and consider what really is one total message through verse 18. But we'll just go through verse 8 this morning. Paul gave some great advice to the Thessalonians. And he wrote to the Thessalonians through the city of Corinth. In fact, he wrote this advice right while he was experiencing right what we're going to study this morning. And this is what he said, "Let ye brethren be not weary in well doing."

As he wrote that to the Thessalonians from Corinth, he was really writing out of his own experience. Because as he arrived in the city of Corinth, he was weary. And I don't suppose there's anybody at our service that doesn't get to that place. I don't suppose there's any Christian who could say, "I've never been discouraged," or "I've never been disheartened." We've all been there, and maybe we've all been weary in well doing.

But God is in the business of encouragement, and we're going to see in verses 1 through 18 how God encourages a weary servant. And at the same time, preaches the Gospel in Vanity Fair, which is just a term to describe the city of Corinth.

Now, Paul, when he arrived in Corinth, had really had it. He'd been chased halfway around the world. He started out in Antioch of Syria on a simple missionary journey with Silas; confirmed some churches in the area over here; Syria, and went through Galatia, confirmed the saints there, took off, continued west and pursued the courses. He was driven by the Holy Spirit. He finally crossed over from Troas and entered into Philippi, and there he preached, and there he was hassled. And there he was chased out of town.

And he arrived in Thessalonica, and there he was persecuted terribly; had to run for his life. And he got to Berea, and no sooner had he established the church there, than the Thessalonians arrived to chase him again. And he finally found himself all alone in the city of Athens, and he was weary there.

And the Gospel presented that Athens was clear and there wasn't any persecution. But there really wasn't any reception to speak of. It was minimal. And so he didn't stay long in Athens, and he packed up and he left Athens. And he comes in again. He's alone, and he arrives in the city of Corinth. And he's discouraged and he's despondent. And he's weak, and he may have even been physically ill.

And it's at that point that God moves in to encourage him. And it is from the Corinthian experience, he wrote to the Thessalonians and says, "Brethren, be not weary in well doing." And he says, "But ye brethren," indicating that maybe they couldn't actually follow his example in that case where he had been weary.

Now, when we saw him in Athens last time, in chapter 17, we saw him in the intellectual city. We saw him in a city that is the university type city. A city of culture. A city of information, of learning, of astuteness. And he's gone from Athens to Corinth. And if Athens is the city of learning, Corinth is sin city. At best, we could probably name it that. It was the most debouched and debased city in that world of that day. In fact, the actual name Corinth became a common term. And "Corinthian" meant immoral.

If you said, "Joe over there is a Corinthian kind of guy, you meant he was immoral." The name became synonymous with vice. To say that that woman is a Corinthian woman meant she was a prostitute, because that's what the women did in Corinth. And the verb, to Corinthianize, meant to go a-whoring. That's exactly what the common use of Corinthianize was.

Now, Corinth was vile to the very core. It wasn't just the slaves or the middle class; it was the upper crust. The whole city was debased, and there were some reasons for that. It was the center of trade and travel, and sailors were going through it all the time, and caravans. And it was a fitting place for entertainment of lust.

The position of Corinth, which I just want to simply illustrate for you in a very brief way, is very interesting and put it in a position to be involved in many interesting things. This entire area in the gray or black represents the area of Greece. This is the northern part of Greece. This is the southern part of Greece.

Now, you'll notice that the two parts are connected by a simple little strait there, and that's only five miles wide, and it was precisely the center of that the city of Corinth existed some 50 miles from Athens. Now, Paul, all alone, finds himself in Corinth Now notice anybody at all from northern Greece to southern Greece, or vice versa, any north-south traffic, had to go through Corinth.

So the trade was constantly trafficking through city of Corinth. Another interesting thing is that it was called The Bridge of Greece, not only because of its north-south traffic, but because of its east-west traffic. Ships wanting to go, say, from the western shore of Greece to the eastern shore would not sail clear around. They would shortcut it through here.

In fact, this was known as the Cape of Malea, and it was sort of like sailing around the Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope. It was a very treacherous journey. The Greeks used to say, "Any man who

sails around the Cape might well write his will before he leaves." Very treacherous, and in the _____ all kinds of vessels they had in those days, man didn't even want to attempt it.

It was also a 200-mile shortcut to go this way. You say, "Well, what did they do when they got to land?" Well, very often, they would unload their entire cargo. They would carry it across on the backs of slaves, or pull it in some kind of apparatus, and they would lower it onto a different ship here. So the ships would just run half circuits going both ways.

In fact, it was such an advantage to go across there that many ships were placed on rollers, and the whole ship was rolled five miles across the land, and dumped back in the water to continue the journey east, or vice versa, to the west.

Now, this area here, was a very important gulf, the Saronic Gulf, and this is the Corinthian Gulf. And there were two very important cities; Cenchreae and Lechaeum on the shore. And from those cities, everything went to Corinth. So Corinth held a very strategic location. You might say to yourself, "Why didn't somebody build a canal?" Well, Julius Caesar had the idea, and Nero started it, and it was finished in 1893. So it took a while, but there's one there now.

Now, the result of this particular location was the fact that there was a tremendous amount of traffic there. And as I said, it became a place where all kinds of activities went on, mostly to entertain the traffic, and so it lent itself greatly to the kind of immorality that became common and synonymous with its name.

Now, Corinth was also a familiar city to many because of the fact that it had what was called the Isthmian Games, which were second only to the Olympics. So it was a center of sports. The people in Corinth were characterized all around the world as vile people.

You know, the Greeks used to love stage plays. They used to put on all kinds of plays, morality plays, and all kinds of things, Greek tragedies, the whole thing. And whenever a Corinthian was in a play, he was always depicted drunk just because of the character of Corinth. If you were from Corinth, you were drunk and immoral.

Now, in the city of Corinth, there was a giant hill that dominated like a bog fortress, and it was a pretty impregnable hill. It is called the Acropolis, and some of you may have heard of it. But the Acropolis was more than just a fortress, it was more than just a hill. It was a temple. And on the top of the Acropolis was built a massive temple to the goddess Aphrodite, who was sort of the goddess of sexual activity.

Now ministering, and I use the word loosely, in Aphrodite's temple, were a thousand priestesses, and their particular ministry was the ministry of prostitution. And so every evening, these thousand

priestesses descended from the Acropolis, and infiltrated the city of Corinth and plied their trade. And so it was a wide-open carnival atmosphere. The whole city was nothing but a great big hustling territory for professional prostitutes.

Now, if you think Paul had a rough time in a city of intellectuals, you can imagine the change when he got into this place. If Athens glorified the mind, Corinth glorified the body. And it’s an exciting thing to see a man who is not only courageous, but who is adaptable, and who can meet anything on its own ground and come out on top.

Now, Corinth was important politically. Corinth was really the county seat, although you might call it the provincial capital. It was to Greece what Washington D.C. is to America in a sense. It was a provincial capital, which meant that the proconsul of Rome stayed there, and the headquarters were there.

It has been said by some writers that Corinth was the vanity fair of the Roman Empire. It was at one the worst of Paris and the worst of London put together. That was Corinth. And so we say that when Paul went to Corinth, it was the Gospel in Vanity Fair.

Now when wanting to describe somebody, if you really wanted to degrade somebody; if you were really upset with somebody and you wanted to really let them have the lowest blow you could possibly give, you would say, "Oh, that individual lives like a Corinthian." And that was absolute desecration to speak like that.

Now, if you'd like a description of how the Corinthians lived, there are many found. You can read 1 and 2 Corinthians, and you can find how the crud of Corinth seeped into the church. You know, just to show you how bad the city was, the church had certain members, certain Christian members, who were celebrating the fact that they were having sex relations with their parents.

Now, when the church gets that in it, you can imagine what must be going on in the world around the church. William Ramsey said that characteristically, churches take on the characteristics of the environment in which they exist culturally. And he's right to a great extent. And the Corinthian church really had a tough time _____ up the holes to keep the garbage of the city from leaking in.

And Paul had to write two letters to straighten them out. And over and over again telling them shape up and purify themselves, and cleanse themselves, and you shouldn't act like that because you're washed and you're clean. Cut that out and so forth. And here comes the Apostle Paul, and he's going to come there and God is going to choose out some believers. And if I can give a vivid metaphor, it would be like looking for jewels in a cesspool. That's vivid, right? And that's exactly what evangelism in Corinth was like. And Paul had to go there and try to find these individuals.

Now, look at verse 10 as an interesting little footnote. The end of verse 1 says, and the Lord speaks to Paul, "I have many people in this city. I have many jewels hidden in this cesspool, and Paul, you're My man to pull them out." Now this was God's elect. These were sovereignly chosen ones, and they were in that city, and they were not yet saved, but they were about to be as Paul came with the Gospel.

They were prepared hearts, seeking hearts, ready hearts, in the midst of that cesspool of Corinth, and Paul was going to reach them with the Gospel. And it's exciting to realize that God cannot always do a lot with intellectuals, but boy he can always do a lot with rotten sinners. Paul didn't stay long in Athens, but he stayed long in Corinth, and Corinth became almost a base of operation for the Gospel.

You know, it was from the city of Corinth that he wrote 1 Thessalonians, that he wrote 2 Thessalonians, that he wrote Romans. And it was back to the Christians at Corinth that he wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians. So the Church in Corinth became a very important base of operations for New Testament, first century Christianity.

Now, when Paul arrived there, he was really discouraged. And as I said at the very beginning, he was at the point where he was weary. I mean let's face it: You get chased halfway around the world and hated by everybody, and hassled by everybody, and frustrated. And you arrive at the next city, and it looks like the worst thing you've ever seen yet? That could get a little old. And he was discouraged.

You know, God is a God of encouragement. I'm not going to take the time to take you through the Psalms and show you all the places where the Psalms reflect on God as a God of encouragement; how many times you can study, even in the New Testament, where Jesus said, "Be of good cheer." Or where you think in John 16:33 Jesus said, "In this world, you shall have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world." God has always, throughout all of revelation, been concerned with the encouragement of His own.

Now, if you believe Philippians 4 is true: My God shall supply what? All your needs. And if a believer needs to be encouraged, what will God do? He'll encourage them. I don't think there's ever been a time when I can say I've lived a whole long period of time without being discouraged. I get discouraged all the time. Discouragement is just a part of life because you have hopes and dreams and desires for people's lives, and they don't come off. Or maybe you spend yourself, and there's an ungrateful heart or a criticism that's unjust, which attempts to impugn your motives whatever. Or maybe you're discouraged with your lot in life, or maybe things aren't working out. We all live with that, but God is a God of encouragement.

And here's Paul, and he's at the bottom. He's discouraged. He was discouraged when he got to Athens and it didn't get any better. And God is going to come in. And this is a - verses 1 to 18 is a

section all about encouragement. And boy, I know I can relate to it. I pray to God you can. He encourages Paul four ways. We'll take two of them. This time, there's four things that God encourages Paul with. One: companionship, his friends. God brings some friends into his life. And isn't it true that friends are an encouragement?

Two: apostleship, his converts. God brings some converts into his life, and that's encouraging. Three: fellowship, his God. God himself comes in fellowship with him and encourages him. And fourth: hardship, his enemies. Did you know you can be encouraged by your enemies? Well, we'll see that in a couple weeks, and that is really an exciting thing to see.

First of all, let's look at companionship. God wants to encourage His down, hard and weary servant. And he's alone now, and he's in this city. And so He encourages him with companionship, verses one through the first part of verse 5. Paul was a - I mean he was one in a million. He was one in history. He arrives in town, and you know what happens? No fanfare. No band plays. No banner, "Welcome Apostle Paul." Nothing. He just walks in quiet, unannounced. Doesn't even know anybody; all alone.

And you say, "Well, how do you know he was discouraged?" Well, there's several reasons I know he was discouraged. When he wrote back to the Corinthians - well, he came to Corinth here, and when he wrote back, he reflected on what his attitude was when he arrived. In 1 Corinthians 2:3, he says this, and I think this is indicative of his spirit. He says, "I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling."

Now, is that like Paul to shake a lot? That isn't like him at all. He was in weakness and fear, and he was shaking. Now, it may have been that he was physically sick as well, but he was hurting. And he wrote back to the Corinthians later, and he said, "Remember when I did come, I was hurting; weakness, fear, and I was shaking." And you know when he wrote to the Thessalonians, he wrote the letter to the Thessalonians right from Corinth, right there when he was there in chapter 18. We'll see that in a minute.

When he wrote them, he says in I Thessalonians 3:7, "Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith." See, what happened was when he was in Corinth, he got word the Thessalonians were growing, and he says, "I was comforted in my affliction and distress." There are five words; fear, trembling. He was nervous. he was trembling. He was in fear. He was in distress. He was in affliction. Now that spells that he was hurting.

He was at the bottom, as it were, in the point of discouragement. Nothing seemed to go like he thought. When he got to Philippi, sure, Lydia's household got saved and the jailer got saved, but then the whole city turned on him and he had to run. He got to Thessalonica and they had a great time there. Some people got saved, and a little church got started, and they chased him out of that place and he went over to Berea and it was quiet there. They were noble people, and they believe, and they

searched the scriptures and they got saved. And they didn't ask him, but guess what? A gang of Jews from Thessalonica came bearing down on Berea to get him again, and they got him out of there at night. And they hustled him to Athens.

And he got to Athens, and he gave a dramatic and dynamic, intellectual offering of who God was. And they heard it, and they listened to it all, and a few believed. And he was discouraged and he left Athens, and he came to Corinth. Then he saw the rottenness of that place, and he just didn't know if he could handle it. It just looked like too much.

And it was precisely at that point that God said, "You need some friends." And God said, "I'm going to comfort you with some companionship," and God brought two people into his life that became to be loved that he mentions them again and again, and again throughout his ministry. Look at verse 2. "After these things, Paul departed from Athens, came to Corinth, and found a certain Jew named Aquilla, born in Pontus. Pontus was a province just on the southern edge of the Black Sea over there north of Turkey, modern Turkey.

So he was born in Pontus; a certain Jew named Aquilla. He latently had come from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. Now, we don't know whether she was a Jew or a Gentile. It doesn't say. Because Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome, and had come to Corinth.

Now, here is Aquilla and Priscilla. Now, you've heard those names, haven't you? You've studied the bible. They became two of the most beloved friends of Paul. It's interesting, I think, to know here that Aquilla is mentioned first. But from now on, the remaining verses, most of them mention Priscilla first. I think it's two out of three.

You say, "Well, why would that be?" Well, really it's three reasons. If you want to count hen-pecked, but we'll eliminate that one. The other two reasons that Aquilla would be mentioned after Priscilla: One, Priscilla may have been a very noble Roman woman. And Aquilla may have married into really highbrow society-type stuff. And so Priscilla kind of ranks as Priscilla first.

The other possibility is that Priscilla became the strength spiritually; that Priscilla really grew spiritually, and consequently she's named first; whichever one, we really don't know. But it is interesting that she is named first, either because of her Roman heritage, if that is the case, or because of her spiritual dimension.

Now, they were in Corinth simply because they had been kicked out of Rome. They were kicked out by Claudius. Now, let me add a note here that I think may be of interest to you. This is an opinion, but I'll try to support it. I believe that Aquilla and Priscilla were Christians already by the time they met Paul. Now, the reason I believe that is because they had come from Rome, and I believe that there was a church in Rome long before Paul ever got there.

You say, "What makes you believe that?" Romans 1:7. Paul wrote - you know where Paul wrote Romans from? From Corinth. And when he wrote Romans, he said, "To all that be in Rome, be loved of God, call to be saints." You see? So there's already a church there. Grace to you; peace from God our Father, Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my god through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

By the time he wrote the Book of Romans, which was later on in another visit to Corinth, the church at Rome had already grown to the place where the faith of those Christians had spread all over the world. And one of the things that may have helped to spread that faith was that all the Christians got booted out of there; all the Jewish Christians.

Now, the Gentile Christians remained, and the Church had remained. The Gentiles who remained, but the Jews who scattered may have been part of the propagation of the Church and the character of it that existed in Rome. So it is very likely that they were Christians already.

There's another reason I believe they were Christians already, and that is that it doesn't say they got saved here in this chapter. And two people of this importance, it seems to me had they been saved there in meeting Paul in Corinth, it would've said so. Because if you go back and see whenever Paul goes into the city, it lists who got saved.

Later on here, it talks about Crispus believing in all his house. And if you go all the way through the New Testament, you'll find all different names of people who were saved in Corinth. In fact, it names a bunch of them, and I'll mention the names in a little while. But it never mentions Aquilla and Pricilla. And it would seem that if it's going to recite their names, why certainly they would be recited here as those who came to know Christ with the others.

Later on, Paul says, "I baptized Gaius," who is this Titus Justus likely. And "I baptized Crispus." He makes no reference to baptizing Aquilla and Pricilla. So it seems they were already Christians. And that's just a little footnote, a little bit of historical graffiti for your file.

Now, when they were in Rome, Aquilla and Pricilla and the other Jews, persecution broke out against the Jews. And Claudius shipped them all out. It's interesting that before Claudius, Tiberius tried to do it. You know what he did? He took 4,000 Jews and sent them to a country that had the plague, hoping they'd all catch the plague and die. So they were unpopular.

Following Tiberius, Claudius, in 39 A.D., banished all Jews from Rome altogether; every one of them had to go. Now we know a little about Claudius. And the reason we do is that about 70 years after the edict, it was written about 120 A.D., Suetonius wrote about Claudius. Suetonius was a historian, and he got all the information on Claudius, and he wrote about his life. And one of the statements that

Suetonius makes in his life of Claudius is this: "As the Jews were indulging in constant riots - listen - at the instigation of Chrestus, Claudius banished them from Rome."

Now, Claudius unloaded all of the Jews because they were always having riots, and the riots were instigated by a person named Chrestus. Now, you know, you can go back in history until you're blue in the face and never find anything about anyone in that area who fits the bill named Chrestus. But what is very interesting is that the Greek Chrestus is only one letter different than the Greek Christis, which is Christ. It's only the difference between an I and an E. And what it seems to be indicating is this: That what caused Claudius to send all the Jews out was they were rioting over the issue of Christ, which indicated probably some missionaries had come there, and had proclaimed Christ again as always was done in the synagogue, and as always happened with Paul, right? A riot ensued, and the element they had accepted Jesus Christ as Messiah was set against the Jews that were unbelieving, and they threw the city into turmoil, and Claudius got uptight and kicked them all out of town.

They were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus. And you see, Suetonius thinks that Chrestus is some guy who lived then in Rome. And remember, he was writing 70 years later, so it's easy to see how he could've made that simple error. They were probably rioting over the issue of Christ. And it seems to me that that kind of issue would preclude the fact there had to be Christ presented there. So therefore, there was the possibility of Aquilla and Pricilla being saved already. You see? And so they arrive over there in Corinth to ply their trade, and they're already Christians.

And incidentally, I'll give you another interesting footnote. It may have been Aquilla and Pricilla who first excited Paul's heart to go to Rome. Well, so there they're introduced in verse 2, and they're so beloved by Paul that he writes about them again and again. Verse 3, "And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them and worked. For by their occupation, they were scanopoioi." _____ say that. It's a good thing, right? Or you'd all be up here asking me what it means. Literally, it means leather workers.

We always think of Paul strictly as a tent maker. The literal word is leather worker. It's only used there in the New Testament, but Paul apparently was a leather worker. Now, part of working with leather was making chance, because chance came from goats' hide, and the leather would have to be tanned. The goat hair was extracted. The goat hair was woven into what was called solecism, which may be connected to where Paul was from, because maybe that was the big trade there; making tents. And Paul apparently would tan the leather, and then having made the hair, he would keep the leather, do something with the leather. He was a leather worker. So were they.

Some historians tell us an interesting thing that in the synagogue, this was in the Jewish synagogue of old, and we were all sitting there. Everybody would be sitting according to their trades. Like we'd have all the carpenters over here. We'd have all the bricklayers over there. We'd have all the artists

over here. In other words, some historians indicate that in synagogues, it was common to divide people in sections according to their trade.

If that is true, maybe that is where Aquilla and Priscilla met Paul. Maybe they sat with him in the synagogue. Now that brings up an interesting point. Have you ever thought that your life revolves around other people, doesn't it? And in most cases, those other people you have met simply on very, very sporadic choices, like for example where you sit. You know, there are some people in this church building this morning that you might absolutely love to death. That is true.

There are some people here that may compliment you fantastically, but you'll never meet them because you always sit in the same place. Have you ever thought about that? Maybe some of you move around? That's perhaps true. But basically, isn't it amazing that we structure our lives by such random choices as where we sit, or where we may go and do this. And we meet these people who become our lives.

And so, somehow Paul met Aquilla and Priscilla. Maybe they sat together over there as common leatherworkers. But anyway, Aquilla and Priscilla were - I don't - it doesn't say anything about it, but you can imagine if you found out they were believers of Jesus Christ, that they just hit it off like gangbusters from the start.

And the next thing you know, in verse 3, because he was of the same craft, he abode with them; he just moved right in their business and he lived there. They had hospitality. That's a great Christian virtue. I don't want to take detail time for it. We did that with Lydia, but what a blessed virtue. He abode with them and worked their occupation. They were tent makers. And so he moved right in, and he became a part of their lives.

And you know, he worked hard. I believe that in Paul, whatever he did; if he made a tent or he preached the Gospel, he put the same thing into it. That's just the kind of man he was. He worked hard. He wasn't a freeloader. He didn't arrive in court and say, "Now, I've got to get around and raise support." He went to work. God doesn't want everybody to raise support. God wants some people to work. And then when the time came, God took care of the support needs.

But you know, he worked hard. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9, he wrote the Thessalonians from Corinth. And he says, "You remember, brethren, our laboring night and day, because we wouldn't be chargeable under any of you." We preached under the Gospel of God. He said, "I didn't want to freeload off you, so I worked night and day." He worked hard.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:8, he says a similar thing. "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nothing. I didn't come over and ask free meals. No, sir, but wrought with labor and travail night and day that we might not be chargeable to any of you." Paul does not want to make his Gospel something that

everybody has to pay for.

You know, it always bothers me, and preachers always say, "Well, do you have a preachers' discount?" Well, that's terrible. What makes you think you deserve a discount? What makes a preacher deserve a discount over anybody else? I think sometimes our Gospel is ill spoken of because some preachers go begging all the time. God help us from begging.

Now, if you are a preacher, I want you to know that May Company does have a 10% discount, and terrific. But I'm saying so many times I think we cast dispersions on the diligence of our own lives by wanting handouts. Paul _____ anybody, he said, "I don't want you chargeable. I didn't eat your bread for nothing. I worked, if I had to, night and day, so that I wouldn't be chargeable to you. If you want to give me something out of love, that's fine. I'm not asking for anything."

I like that kind of spirit, and I think God will take care of the man of God. I don't think the man of God needs to ask for anything. I think he needs to put the needs out there and let God supply.

Well, he worked until the Lord's good time to free him. And let me just bounce off of this. I think that it's very important for us to know this: that God expects the Church to support ministries that are effective. I believe that. But I think so many times, the Church doesn't wait to see what's effective. My feeling, and it's a strong feeling, is this: People say to me, "John, I'd like to become a part of your staff, or I'd like to get a full-time position." I always say the same thing to them. I say this: "You start a ministry, and you prove yourself faithful while you're earning your living. And if you're faithful enough, God will release you from your living and will support you full time to do your ministry if it's that important to Him."

Do you believe that? I believe that with all my heart. You know what? Most Christian ministry winds up just buying a pig in a poke. Some guys says, "We need somebody over there." Guy says, "I volunteer." "You're hired." Next thing you know, they send him out there and they can't do the job.

I hate to tell you this, but over 50% of the missionaries who go to the field come back after the first time. The picture of the Church ____ so much sort of like musical churches. You know? The music stops and everybody grabs a church. And this church changes pastors, and this guy goes and gets a youth director, and this guy gets Christian ed, and there's a minister of music, and everybody is sort of like all over the place.

What is this? And very often, a guy can't get it going over here, and he figures the grass is got to be greener. It takes you two years to figure out they can't get it going over there, either, and that's just long enough for somebody over there to want him. You know, he just bounces around and never gets it going.

I really believe, people, that if you in your life have accredited your ministry before God, that God will bring you to the place where you have full support if that's what He desires. I believe that. And in our case, that's exactly what we believe. I'm not concerned with going and seeing a guy do a good job over at some church and getting him to do it here. If he's doing a good job over there, let him be there. If he's not doing a good job over there, who wants him?

Listen, if God has given you to me, then I want to see you develop a ministry that God will so bless, that He'll free you up from your other responsibilities so you can do it full-time, and support you. That's what I believe. That's a little bit of a heresy for some, but that's what I believe. And people say, well, "Gee, I'd like to get into full-time ministry. I'd like to just be able to give my whole life to it." Then you give every other spare moment you've got to it, and you watch when it becomes fruitful enough; that God will honor that by making it something that can support your life.

I believe that, and that's what happens, too. Now, this isn't taught here in dogmatism, it's just alluded to, and it just kind of scrummed me off into that concept that I think is so important.

Well, just to show you what I mean, look at verse 4. He reasoned in the synagogue every day. Is that what it says? No, every sabbath. See, he had to work the rest of the time. You say, "What a waste. What a waste." No, no, no, not a waste. He was proving some things. One, he was proving to the people of Corinth he didn't come to intrude on them and demand from them. He came to give himself to them. And if he had to pay the price to give himself, he'd pay it. And secondly, he was allowing the time for the accrediting of his ministry so that God could free him up to do it full-time when the time was right. Believe me, that's how God works.

You know, it's so exciting to see somebody with a fruitful ministry, and to see that ministry going and going and developing and developing. And then you realize someday you go to this, and this is how all of this happened _____ church have grown up and been a part of our family. We've seen a ministry develop and develop, and develop, and we just go to them and say, "Hey, my brother. Your ministry is developing. God is speaking to us about having you free from your other responsibilities in the secular world to come and be supported by the body to serve all the time." And that's the way it happens when they are faithful.

Well, _____ what he did every Sabbath was reason in synagogue. And the verb to reason is our same verb we've seen to many times in Acts; it means to discuss by question and answer. It means to convince, to dialogue, dialectic comes from it. It's an imperfect tense, which means you continually get it over and over again, over and over again. And you'll notice he was persuading them. It shouldn't be translated persuaded, but that sounds like a point action eress verb, when it's not. It's imperfect. He was in the process of persuading them. He was seeking to persuade them.

Now, if you know anything about Paul, what was he trying to persuade those Jews? That Jesus was what? The Messiah, of course. That was always what he was doing. And he was doing it for the Jews and also the Greeks. The Greeks would be the god fearing Greeks, the ones who attached to the synagogue and believed in the true God.

Well, I'll tell you, isn't it exciting how God brought two people into a lonely man's life, who became so beloved that they had a place in the rest of his life? First, in Romans 16:3, they're mentioned. In 1 Corinthians 16:19 they're mentioned. In 2 Timothy, I think it's 4:19, they're mentioned again. He loved them. And you know what happened? Eventually a church grew up in their house. God has a way of meeting the need of a discouraged believer with companionship.

Well, I've seen that so many times I've been discouraged. And of course, you meet somebody, or you meet a new friend or an old friend who just kind of takes all the rough edges off, and ministers to you. You need each other. It is not good for man to be what? Alone; God knew that from the beginning. But you know, if new friends are wonderful, you want to know what's just as good or maybe better? Old friends. There's something about old friends that is just rich, and God says, "Well, I want to give you two new ones. I want to give you two old ones." And so verse 5, "And when Silas and Timothy would come from Macedonia." Stop there.

Two old friends arrive. Listen, that was a great day when they arrived. There was so much joy going on that day you said _____ see that. It says, "They came from Macedonia." Some guy in a _____ of me and criticism, he wrote and he said, "I've never seen anybody with such a vivid imagination." That's okay.

"When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia." It doesn't really give you an idea about the joy, does it? No, it doesn't, but it was there. Believe me. So why should I believe you? I'll show you why. In 1 Thessalonians, chapter 3, verses 1 and 2; listen now. Back up a minute before you read that verse, watch. "Paul was at Athens." Remember chapter 17:15 and 16? Paul went to Athens and he was going to wait for who? Timothy and Silas to come, because he left them in Berea. And he went to Athens alone.

The question always comes up, "Did Timothy and Silas ever come to Athens?" The book of Acts does not say whether they did, but we believed they did. They came to Athens. So why do you believe that? Well, right here. I'll show you in a moment. Here's what happened, "Timothy and Silas came to Athens and met Paul." You know what they did as soon as they got there? They said, "Paul, we're here." Probably, "We're here." He said, "Good, now I want you to go back." And he sent Timothy to Thessalonica to check on the saints.

Remember our earlier studies of Acts, how we saw that Paul was so concerned with the saints and their growth? So they just arrived. He'd been waiting for them in Athens. They get there, and he says, "Now I want you to go back to Thessalonica." So old Timothy turns around and off he goes to Thessalonica. And he says to Silas, "Silas, you go to Philippi and check on Luke and what's going on in the church up there."

So off they go again. And so he's alone at Athens and he

goes to Corinth. So when he comes to Corinth, he's alone, but he's already met with Timothy and Silas, and now they come again to him in Corinth. Now, the reason we know they come again is in 3:1 and 2 of 1 Thessalonians. "Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone." You see, for a while he was not alone at Athens. But finally, he realized we can't wait any longer. I've got to send you guys back to check on those churches.

Verse 2: "We sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow worker in the Gospel of Christ, to establish you and to comfort you concerning your faith." And who is this "you" to whom he's writing? The Thessalonians. So he sent Timothy from Athens back to the Thessalonians. And you say, "Well, where did he send Silas?" Well, he sent him to Philippi. You say, "Where does he say that?" It doesn't say that. But I'll tell you what it does say. Something pretty exciting.

Look at Philippians chapter 4. Now he's writing to the Philippians. Now, you Philippians know, also, that in the beginning of the Gospel, "When I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me as concerning giving and receiving but you only." Now, wait a minute. Stop right there. The Philippian church sent him money, didn't they? No church supported me but you Philippians. How did that money get to them? Go to 2 Corinthians 11:9.

This is exciting. Watch this. He said, "When I was present with you, and lacked, I was chargeable to no man. For that which was lacking to me, the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in all things, I have kept myself from being burdensome." The brethren who came from Macedonia brought him this. Now, apparently, Silas and Timothy, verse 5 of Acts 18: When Timothy and Silas were come from Macedonia, they're a friend. I have some brethren from Macedonia.

So Silas had gone to Philippi, and the Philippian church had taken a love offering, and he brought that, and Timothy brought news that the Thessalonians were moving out and growing. Listen, now you know why that was a joyous reunion. It was terrific.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:6, listen to this. Now watch, here's some more historical notes. As soon as Timothy arrives, he says, "Paul, the gang in Thessalonica is growing, and they're comforted, and they're strong." And he was so excited. Paul sat right down and took out his little whatever he wrote with, and he wrote 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians was written right there in verse 5 of Acts 18:5.

when Timothy and Silas arrived, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians.

You know what he says to them? Listen to this: 1 Thessalonians 3:6, "But now when Timothy came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and love, and that you have good remembrance of us always, and are engrated to see us as we all sort of see you; therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you an all our affliction and distress." He was hurting ____ the comfort game when he heard Timothy's words about the Thessalonian's Christians. And I love verse 8. He says, "For now, we live if you stand fast in the Lord."

You know, the man's very life was the growth of his children? He actually said, "Life is your growth. I live if you stand fast." For what thanks can we render to God again for you? Watch. "For all the _____ joy with which we joy for your sakes before our God." Now you know it was a joyous reunion, don't you? Timothy arrived. He was so blessed; Paul was when he heard they were growing. And then listen, he was double blessed because Silas came in with money. He said, "Paul, I have news for you. You are finished as a tent maker." Now that goes back to 18:5, and look, "And when Timothy and Silas would come to Macedonia,' now watch this, "Paul," it says in the King James, "was pressed in the spirit." The oldest manuscripts say this: "Paul," and this is important, "began devoting himself completely to the Word." That's the New American Standard, and that's correct.

What it means is that when Timothy came with all the joy, Silas came with a love offering. He quit making tents, and completely devoted himself to the Word. Now you see how God comforts a disheartened saint: with companionship. What a joyous time.

Now, just reflecting back on that point before we leave it. Paul worked when he had to work. He worked when he had to work. But you know, that doesn't mean that every preacher is supposed to work manually. I think if the need is there, then it should be done. But it is also the same Paul who is writing to the same Corinthians, and that's a most interesting thing.

It says in 1 Corinthians 9, now listen verse 7, "Who goes to war at his own expense?" Do you know any army that has its soldiers pay its own say? Or who plants a vineyard and eats not of its fruit? You know anybody that spends all his time planting a crop and doesn't get to eat it? Or who feeds the flock and doesn't drink the milk? In other words, the support comes from within what you're doing.

Now say _____ these things as a man, or set not the law the same? Is it just me, or does God say this in his law? It is written in the Law of Moses. "Don't muzzle the mouth of the ox which treads out the grain." If you're going to have the ox tread the grain, you're going to have to feed him some of the grain. See, that's the point.

And he goes on to talk about this. Verse 11, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it any big deal if we reap some money?" Pretty straight stuff. Pay the preacher he says. Verse 12, "If others be

partakers of this rite over you, are not we rather?" Verse 13, to use a priest as an example, "Don't you know that they would minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple?" The priests are supported by the funds taken into the temple. Then verse 14, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." And I heard so many people say, "You know that means practice what you preach." That doesn't mean that at all. That means if you go to preach it, you got to live it, brother. No, no, no, no. That means, if you're going to preach it, you should be supported by it.

If you're going to preach the Gospel, you should live from your preaching. In other words, the church should support the one who preaches and teaches. And that's indicated in 1 Timothy 5:17, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor." Listen, if you've got a faithful pastor, there's nothing wrong with giving him, and the word double honor has a monetary connotation. You're giving him additional support for his faithfulness, especially those who labor in the Word in doctrine."

So in a difficult time and in a difficult place, the servant of God works to earn his keep. He may work until God sees his ministry develop to the place where God wants to free him to do it full-time. And then God says the church is to carry his support. And what a marvelous joy it is for the church, for all of us, to carry the support of the ministry of those who minister among us."

All right, one then: God comforts Paul, encourages him with companionship. Two, and quickly we're just going to look at this, with apostleship. If his friends were a comfort, so were his converts. You know converts are a comfort. I've been discouraged so many times, and I guess when you speak a lot, sometimes you can't see how important a meeting is. To you, it's another meeting. It's a date on a calendar. And I'll look at my office, and I'll realize after I'm done with a day of study, I'll look at them and say, "Oh, I've got to go to San Bernardino tonight and speak." And I don't know what it is. It's the First Mogus Church of somewhere.

I don't know what's going on. And you sit there and you say, "I don't want to go out there and do that." And I got home, and Patricia says, "Where are you going tonight?" "Well, I go to go to ____." "Oh, no, really?" "Well, you know, and I don't have time to eat dinner." "Well, stop at Pup and Taco." And so I can hardly get out the door, you know? And I say, "Well, just give me a shove, will you? I don't want to do this." You're discouraged. You're tired. You're weary. You got other things on your mind, and you don't even know what's going on out there. And you drive all the way out there. You know it's a long drive, and you're hoping there's a Laker game, so at least you can pass the time listening to the radio."

And you finally get out there, and you go and you speak. And you just can't get generated, and it's all over, and 15 people get saved. I couldn't tell you how many times something like that has happened. Somebody comes up and says, "My life was transformed." And pretty soon, you're so full of joy, and you get back in your car. You turn the radio off. You don't want it to interrupt your praise. And you

drive all the way home, and it takes about five minutes. You know? And you come in and share all the victories.

You see, very often God uses, in the lives of his servants not only the companionship of beloved friends, but converts? He gives you fruit just when you need it the most. See, that's what happens to Paul. Just when he really needed it, these guys came with the money. They freed him up. He was free to give himself totally to the Word, that is now what the apostles are supposed to do? Acts 6:4, "We will give ourselves to the Word and to prayer." You chose some men to handle the business, and old Paul was free to be an apostle. He was free to do what the priority was in his life. God freed him up when the time was right, and he didn't only preach on a Saturday; he took off doing it every day. He just whistled through that place day in, day out. And what did he say? Verse 5: "He testified to the Jews that Jesus was Messiah."

Well, you know, you can predict the response, can't you? Verse 6: "And when they oppose themselves and blasphemed," that's what they do. And the word oppose means they had an organized opposition. It's the word that indicates organized resistance. They came to a deliberate and ultimate final decision that this was wrong; that Jesus was not Messiah. They organized themselves. They set themselves against, and they blasphemed Christ.

And Paul got really to the point where he said, "That's it." And look what he did. He shook his raiment, and said to them, "Your blood be upon your heads. I am clean. From now on, I'll go to the Gentiles." Wow. Boy, I'm telling you. That is one of the most dramatic scenes in his life. Can you see him going in there?

You know, the Jews had a saying about shaking the dust off your feet. And it was used in reference to Gentile countries. Whenever a Jew traveled in a Gentile country, when he left he would shake the dust off his feet because he didn't want to take any Gentile dust to soil the dust of Israel.

And you see, the idea of the shaking of dust was the Jews' way of sort of casting degrading statements toward the Gentiles. Well, you know what Paul does? He turns it around, and he takes his cloak off, and he just starts shaking all the dust out of it in the faces of all those Jews, and saying in effect, "You don't like Gentile dust on your shoes. I don't want Jewish dust on my cloak." And he shook it right out in their face.

Now you know if they weren't mad by then, they were really hopping when that was done. That flagrant kind of insult must've absolutely torn them to pieces. He was done with them. Shook out his whole cloak. And then he made a statement that was interesting. He said, "Your blood be upon your own heads."

That's again a statement that the Jews made. It's in Joshua 2:19, 2 Samuel 1:16,, 1 Kings 2:37, and perhaps elsewhere. And do you remember in Matthew 27:25? "That the Jews, when Jesus was being crucified, cried out 'His blood be upon us and our children.'" They wanted to accept the responsibility for Christ's death. The phrase means we accept the responsibility for His death. And Paul is saying here, "Your blood is on your own hands. I'm clean. Why? I fulfilled my responsibility. I delivered the Gospel. I presented it clearly. You are responsible for what you do.

People say to me, "John, do you believe the bible teaches individual responsibility?" There it is, my friend. If you die without Jesus Christ, your blood is on your own head. And I can say to you this morning what Paul said: "I'm clean. I presented you the Gospel. What you do with it will determine your eternal destiny, and the responsibility is your own."

Now, we're going to see how that fits in with the statement in verse 10, where God says, "I have many people in this city." That's a sovereign statement of election. Here is a statement of human responsibility. In two weeks we'll put them together and see what the significance is. But for the moment, Paul says, "You are responsible for your own decision. I'm clean. I've had it. I'm going to the Gentiles." You say, "Paul, but your mother is ____. You're such a lover of Israel. Paul, why'd you do that?" Well, what a change of character. His _____ my heart's desire, and all this. "Oh, how is he possibly going to leave Israel?"

Watch, I love this. "And he departed from there." Boy, he was really going to leave them. And entered into a certain man's house named Titus Justus, who worshipped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue." Right, he really got away from them, didn't he? Boy, I'll show them, I'm going next door.

You see, that was his heart for Israel. That point he still couldn't leave. And so he went next door. And you know, in his mind, he knew that all of them could take the same route to the synagogue and just cut off one step short and hear the Gospel. He never got away from Israel.

Well, he departed, and entered a certain man's house. He lived in this man's house; Titus Justus. That's interesting. It's a Roman name. He was a Gentile, god fearer, who attended the synagogue. And you know, he's the same apparently as the man called Gaius, G-A-I-U-S, in Romans 16:23. And in 1 Corinthians 1:14, Paul says, "I baptized only two; Gaius and Crispus."

Apparently, this is Gaius, and his Roman name, and there were often three names, would be Gaius Titus Justus. So this man became a Christian. They had a church in his house next door to the synagogue. Kind of like we are right here with the temple about three doors down. And he began to bear fruit. Now if you think that was something, look at verse 8, absolutely thrilling. "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord and his entire household." Can you imagine that?

I mean now he's next door and what happens? The fruit of it is the guy who runs the synagogue gets saved. And not only him, his whole house; all his family and all of His servants. Oh, man, you can imagine the fury that gets going on now among the Jews. And Paul can hear the time bomb ticking, and in two weeks, we'll see if go off. But they were infuriated. This whole house believed. You can do a study on the households they believed: Lydia, the Philippian jailer, and Crispus. And there's another one in Corinth, the House of Stephanus, that later believed. It's not in this chapter. It's referred to elsewhere.

But they had a great revival in that town. It was fabulous. It says "Many of the Corinthians herein believed and were baptized." And the bible even names them; Stephanus and his whole house, Erastus Fortunatus, who is the city treasurer, a very important man. There was Quartus, Fortunatus, Chloe, Tertius, Accolis, and a whole lot of names. And the church was established.

Well, God encouraged Paul, didn't He? With his friends and his converts; companionship and the fulfillment of his apostleship. Let me close with a footnote. ____ verse 8: "Hearing, believed and were baptized." Notice the sequence, would you? That's the order of salvation. You hear the Gospel. You what? You believe it. You publicly proclaim it in baptism. Listen, "Faith," Romans 10:17, "comes by hearing a speech about Jesus Christ." _____ that's salvation. You hear, you believe and you make a public statement."

Isn't it exciting to see how God encourages His servant? He encourages them with companionship and apostleship. And next time, we'll see how He encourages him with fellowship and hardship.

Let's pray. Lord, we are grateful again this morning that our hearts have been enriched to be with Paul, and be with the Holy Spirit in this study. Father, we thank You that in the midst of our discouragement, you encourage us. And when we are despondent, you lift us up. When our eyes droop and our hearts sag, you cause us to lift our eyes and look on thee. And maybe it's two beloved friends, new and old. Maybe it's through fruit that you give us in our lives, but you're in the business of encouraging.

Father, thank You for the lessons we learned this morning. We thank You for Jesus Christ, who teaches us. Father, we pray this morning that if there are any discouraged Christians, that they might wait on Thee for that moment of encouragement that is to come. If there are any who do not know Jesus Christ, that they might meet Christ today and they might open their heart and invite him to come in. We thank You for our time, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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