



“Stop Being Afraid...”

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 18:1-17

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I asked my wife the other night as I was tucking her in bed what words she would use to describe Paul. She used words like “bold,” “unflinching,” “courageous,” “sacrificial.” I added words like “faithful,” “steadfast,” “determined,” “devoted,” “urgent,” and “selfless.” I suppose that all of us, if we were asked, would use similar adjectives to describe the greatest of the Apostles. The reason is because we hold Paul in high esteem. We have made him almost like a Christian superhero. After all, there is really very little debate that he was the greatest Christian who ever lived. We can sometimes put him on a pedestal and make him seem almost otherworldly. And because we sometimes do that, we have a hard time thinking of him as a man like ourselves. And that is what makes the text that we are looking at so surprising and so valuable.

In this passage that we are looking at today, we see Paul in a very vulnerable state. He is wrung out, exhausted, and – dare I say it – fearful. He’s been through a lot. This second missionary journey has taken a lot out of him. It started out with the painful and sharp parting between he and Barnabas. That’s an immensely difficult and forboding start. Then, immediately, the Spirit of God upended his ministry plans as God prevented him from going to Asia as Paul desired. Instead, having received a vision from the Lord, Paul went to Philippi where he was violently opposed by the unbelieving Jews, his exorcism of a demon possessed girl leading to he and Silas being cruelly and horrifically beaten within an inch of their lives and fastened in stocks in the lowest part of the prison. Having left Philippi, he labored intensively and exhaustingly in Thessalonica for the sake of the gospel before again being fiercely opposed and being driven out of town by the hardhearted, jealous and vicious Jews. Moving on to Berea, after preaching Christ, you remember the Thessalonian Jews had trailed him and hounded him out of town, only for Paul to end up in Athens, a city awash in idolatry. While in Athens, despite his masterful presentation of the gospel and his brilliant sermon before the Areopagus, he had been mocked and derided, the gospel of Jesus Christ laughed at and largely ignored by the proud intellectuals of the day -- a response that may have been even harder for Paul to endure than just outright hatred and rejection.

And now he comes to Corinth, a city that is world famous for its wickedness and perversion. It is a daunting task for certain and Paul is deeply tired – spiritually and physically. In his first letter that he wrote to the Corinthians, Paul described his condition when he came to them: “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:1–5, ESV) Don’t miss those words – weakness, fear, trembling. It is easy to do. Our eyes so gravitate toward his testimony about Christ and the cross, about the Spirit and the power of God, that it is easy to miss the truth that Paul was in a bad way. The word weakness speaks of timidity and fear that is the result of a lack of confidence. The word fear is a word that means “ a state of severe distress, aroused by intense concern for impending pain, danger, or evil.” The word trembling speaks of a “trembling or quaking with fear. It was used to describe the anxiety of one who distrusts his ability completely to meet all requirements, but religiously does his utmost to fulfill his duty.” This was the state of Paul’s heart as he came to the city of Corinth and that is not the way that we are used to seeing Paul. He is fearful, lacking confidence, gripped with personal doubt, discouraged, timid and trembling at what he is going to face in Corinth, feeling the cumulative effects of painful and personally costly ministry and now it’s out of the frying pan and into the fire, so it seems.

It is nearly impossible for us to fully grasp the wickedness and sensuality of Corinth – its debauchery, as I said, was world-famous. If Athens was known for its proud intellectualism and idolatry, Corinth was known for its proud sexual perversion, rank immorality, and idolatry. The city, itself, was a cosmopolitan mixture of people, races and religions. Situated on the narrow isthmus that connected the upper and main part of Greece with the Peloponnesus, its southern peninsula, Corinth was a melting pot. Because of its location and geography, Corinth was a unique center of commerce and life. Trade came through Corinth from North, South, East and West. Everything that you could want in goods, in philosophy, in human wisdom, in entertainment, and in fleshly desire was available in Corinth. This city brought together people from all over the Roman Empire and with such a wide range of people came a wide range of sin...crippling, debilitating and soul-enslaving sin.

Corinth was the proud center of the cult of the “love” goddess, or maybe it would be better to say the “lust” goddess, Aphrodite. As such, in the name of worship, it was home to some of the most perverted behavior recorded in human history. The temple of Aphrodite was one of the great architectural wonders of the ancient world and it was also home to thousands of temple prostitutes that plied their trade, in the name of religion, among not only the natives, but also the sailors and businessmen that passed through Corinth. But Aphrodite was not alone. In addition there were multitudes of other gods brought there from around the Empire, complete with their temples and shrines and priests and priestesses, aka prostitutes.

In fact, so widespread was the sin, so perverse was the culture of Corinth that the name “Corinthian” or “to Corinthianize” became synonymous with deep sexual perversion and immorality. To call someone a “Corinthian” was a great insult. One way to get a sense of the widespread sin and depravity of Corinth is to consider how Paul described their past in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, “Or 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, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 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, ESV) All those things from which Christ freed them – sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, thievery, greed, drunkenness, slander – that’s reviling, plundering others – take those to their worst extreme and that was commonplace in Corinth. So Paul was coming to a city far worse than he had ever been to – more arrogant, more filled with immorality, sensuality and godlessness, more wealthy, more fleshly indulgent than any he had faced. It would have the same kind of arrogant and jealous Jews and proud intellectuals that he faced in Athens, in a culture of materialism and perversion that was unsurpassed anywhere.

The challenge of taking the gospel to Corinth was daunting to say the least. All of these factors contributed to the trepidation that faced Paul as he came to the city. He was weary, lonely, beaten down by constant opposition, physically and spiritually weak, fearful of the reception he would receive, concerned about his fitness to minister, concerned about the power of the gospel as he faced the greatest challenge to the gospel that he had yet seen. So let’s pick it up in verse 1 and let’s watch how God ministers to Paul to rejuvenate him and in at the same time uses him powerfully to proclaim the gospel.

“After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.” (Acts 18:1–4, ESV) The first thing that God does is arrange the meeting and eventual partnership of Paul with Priscilla and Aquila. It’s interesting the way that this all plays out and the way that God orchestrates this. We don’t really know how Aquila and Priscilla became believers. Some speculate that they came to faith in Rome when the gospel was brought back there by Roman Jews that were visiting Jerusalem on Pentecost. He probably met them in the synagogue since people of like professions – tentmakers and leather-workers – usually sat together. They may have even heard Paul preach. They had come to Corinth as a result of the decree of Caesar Claudius that all of the Jews should be expelled from Rome because of the uprisings caused by the followers of “Chrestus” -- the unrest caused by the conflict between Jews and the Christians about whether or not Jesus is the Christ. In order to restore order to the city, Claudius Caesar expelled all of the Jews from Rome – which included the Christians, as they were seen as a sect of the Jews and that was what brought them to Corinth. At any rate, Paul moved in with the couple and began working his trade in order to provide for his needs.

And thus would begin one of the great gospel partnerships in the NT. When Paul eventually left Corinth, they would accompany him to Ephesus, helping him to establish a house church there. Later they would return to Rome, leading another church there and Paul would say of them: “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.” (Romans 16:3–4, ESV) God graciously ordained that Paul would meet this couple, which would be such blessing to him, by turning the heart of Claudius to expel all of the Jews from Rome.

Paul, for himself, continued his ministry in the same way he had always done it, by starting with the Jews and the Gentile God-fearers in the synagogue – reasoning with them from the Scriptures and attempting to persuade them that Jesus is the Christ.

“When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.” (Acts 18:5, ESV) Not long after that, God arranged for Silas and Timothy to join Paul in Corinth, putting the missionary team back together, another encouragement for Paul. No longer feeling alone in the fight, he had his trusted companions

and these new partners in the gospel. Silas and Timothy found Paul “occupied with the word.” That is an interesting phrase. It is a word that means to continually give yourself to something, to continue to apply yourself to something. It would be the equivalent in our terminology of “having a one track mind.” And he was giving testimony – not just academic information about Jesus or spirituality – but the idea that he was “making a serious declaration on the basis of personal knowledge.” Trying to reach his people.

You know the heart of Paul for the Jews. He would testify in Romans 9: “I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” (Romans 9:1–5, ESV) This was the weight on Paul’s soul for his fellow Jews. He desperately wanted them to be saved, to turn from their sins, to embrace the forgiveness and atonement of the cross, to trust Christ as Savior and Lord, to be rescued from the wrath to come. It consumed him. And it seemed that the more that he preached to them, the more that he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, the more that proved that Jesus is the Christ, the harder and harder their hearts became and that was the case here.

Like clockwork, we read: “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.”” (Acts 18:6, ESV) as was the case in every other synagogue, the very people that Paul was trying to reach, the very ones whom he wanted so desperately to hear and believe the gospel, instead opposed him and reviled him, hated him without cause, and rejected the salvation in Christ because it required them to own their sin, to own their lostness, to lay aside their stubborn hold on their religious traditions and imaginary family and spiritual legacy and to cry out for mercy and grace for salvation, to cry out to Christ as the only hope for their souls.

Paul’s response to their rejection was pointed and it is reminiscent of Ezekiel’s ministry -- 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. You get a sense here of the prophetic tradition in which Paul saw himself. Like Ezekiel, he saw himself as a watchman on the wall, pleading with his kinsmen to turn to Christ before it was too late. Ezekiel wrote of his own ministry in Ezekiel 33:

“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.” (Ezekiel 33:7–9, ESV) This was the weight that was continually on Paul. The heaviness that he alone carried, that bore down on him. It is a weight impossible to know apart from a calling like Paul’s.

Symbolically shaking the dust off his clothing, declaring that he was free of responsibility for the their iniquity and sinful rebellion, he left the synagogue in Corinth, never to return. The focus would be on the Gentiles in Corinth now – not that no more Jews would be saved -- but his focus would be on the Gentiles. Notice what Paul does.

“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. 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.” (Acts 18:7–8, ESV) In a bold and wise move, Paul moved the center of his gospel ministry to the house right next door to the synagogue, to the house of a believer named Titius Justus. There, the few Jews who might want to hear more of the gospel were able to find him and, at the same time, he was able to teach and preach to the Gentiles in Corinth without the noisy distraction of the Jews who opposed his message. And we see that his gospel preaching was met with success. Crispus, who had been the ruler of the synagogue was saved, along with his family. Many of the Gentile Corinthians, sickened by sin and longing for deliverance from the wrath of God and their worthless living also found life in Christ. But although it may have seemed that everything was moving in the right direction, we know that Paul was still gripped by fear, still discouraged, still distressed. The rest of this text makes that clear. What Paul needed was a fresh vision of Christ, a fresh perspective on his calling, encouragement that could only come from the Lord. We talk about this a lot. This is what all of us needs in times of fear and discouragement – a fresh, soul re-orienting vision of the Lord. He needed a fresh vision of Christ and it is exactly, literally, what he got.

“And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “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, for I have many in this city who are my people.”” (Acts 18:9–10, ESV) This vision of Christ would rejuvenate and

reinvigorate the heart and soul of Paul. I want you to see how Christ does this. It is a beautiful picture of the shepherding heart of God. He doesn't act as we might expect. He doesn't give credence to Paul's fears, doesn't commiserate with Paul about how hard this all is, and doesn't work through all of his issues one-by-one. Instead, He first rebukes Paul, gives him a command, reminds him of His promise, and then gives him encouragement.

First he says, "Do not be afraid..." In the Greek, the sense of what Jesus says to Paul is "stop being afraid." He knows his heart, knows what is troubling him. Paul's soul is an open book to Jesus and Christ knows that he doesn't need to be coddled. He needs to be treated as a soldier of the cross and the first thing he needs to hear is a rebuke. A mild one, but a rebuke nonetheless. "Stop being afraid, Paul." It was a rebuke that Paul took to his heart. This is the man that would later say to Timothy, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God," (2 Timothy 1:8, ESV) and "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 2:3, ESV) Paul needed a splash of cold water, a strong word from Jesus and he got it. Jesus called him to be of good courage, to find his strength and determination again.

Then Jesus commanded him, go on speaking and do not be silent. Paul was no good to Jesus if he wavered on the truth, if he didn't preach with confidence and certainty. Remember the calling upon Paul's life that the Lord expressed to Ananias when Paul was converted: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9:15-16, ESV) You can't speak to Jews, Gentiles, and kings with doubts and fears. He needed to go on preaching the gospel that had been entrusted to him, to go on preaching the gospel to those who needed to hear, "You are a lost sinner, alienated from a holy God. The only remedy for your sin is the shed blood of God's Son, Jesus Christ. You must repent of your sin and trust in Christ in order to be saved from God's judgment." This was the purpose Christ had entrusted to him when he saved Paul. He couldn't quit now.

Then he reminded Paul of what he already knew, but that, in a sense, he had forgotten – "I am with you." Those are some of the greatest four words in Scripture. I, the Lord of heaven and earth, the one with all authority, all power, the one rich in mercy and steadfast love – I am with you. It was an echo of the promise Christ had given in the Great Commission and of the promise found in Isaiah which is true of all who are God's covenant people: "But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have

redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” (Isaiah 43:1–3, ESV) Paul had no reason to be afraid for Christ was with Him. Christ trumps all fears.

Was there a threat that the Corinthians would rise up against him? Yes. There was always that threat. That is the nature of the gospel. Like we have seen repeatedly in Scripture, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18, ESV) To the proud, self-sufficient, self-justifying, self made man or woman, who cling tenaciously to the wisdom of the world, the gospel is foolishness and something to be hated. But to those who are being saved, it is the greatest news imaginable and it brings a life full of peace, gratefulness, love and joy. The gospel would draw a line and the threat of a violent response was always there. But Christ was with Him...who could successfully oppose him? And in Corinth, at least for now, and really for the rest of his ministry to a great degree, Jesus makes a very specific promise to Paul.

“No one will attack you to harm you...” In other words, Jesus was promising to Paul a sort of respite in Corinth, surprisingly enough. In fact, to a great degree, the kind of suffering and bodily injury that Paul had previously suffered would come to an end. He would still be rejected and threatened, he was going to experience a shipwreck in the not too distant future, he would be persecuted and hated, struck on occasion, but the kind of physical abuse that Paul had been experiencing was going to come to an end until his ministry was fulfilled and he would be martyred for his faith. Until the day that Christ called him home, he would be invulnerable.

And then he gives him this great encouragement. “I have many in this city who are my people...” God is referring to His elect, chosen before the foundation of the world in Christ Jesus, unknown to Paul but fully known to Christ. Who would have thought it, in a city as steeped in wickedness and immorality as Corinth that Christ would have many of His own? Christ’s elect were there, but Paul had to preach the gospel to them so that they could believe. That’s why Paul later wrote, “Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (2 Timothy 2:10, ESV) Christ was at work to redeem His elect and He had many in the city of Corinth. Rather than preach the gospel and move on, always on the run, Paul would be able to stay in Corinth for an extended period of time as the Lord used him to build his church. And that is just what he did.

“And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” (Acts 18:11, ESV) That must have seemed like forever to Paul.

Still, opposition did break out and the promise of Christ would be put to the test. “But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, “This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.”” (Acts 18:12–13, ESV) This has a familiar ring to it, doesn’t it? Let me tell you a little about Gallio. Gallio was the brother of the Roman philosopher Seneca, who was a thoroughgoing Stoic. We learned about those guys last week. Gallio was a professing Stoic, as well, but as a proconsul, he had a reputation for being fair and just, and not easily manipulated.

He easily saw through the bluster and accusations and jealousy of the Jews. He viewed this as strictly a Jewish affair. Now Judaism was considered to be a “religio licita” - an authorized religion. And the Jews were charging Paul with violating its teachings. Gallio saw it as internal bickering and not something he wished to get involved in. Watch this.

“But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.”” (Acts 18:14–15, ESV) I want you to see what God does here using the unbeliever Gallio. One writer put it this way: “Up to this point in time, Rome had been no friend to Christianity. Rome had succumbed to Jewish pressure, putting Jesus to death for crimes which Pilate and Herod knew Jesus had not committed. Roman officials had willingly, perhaps even gladly, punished Paul, as was the case at Philippi. But now a great change was about to occur, thanks to the decision rendered by Gallio. Rome was to cease giving in to Jewish pressure, and was to refuse, any longer, to be used by the Jews to hinder the proclamation of the gospel. The very power that had once persecuted Christianity would now become a means of protecting it.” Gallio’s ruling, beloved, set a very important precedent. His ruling rejected the charge of the Jews that the gospel was un-Jewish or anti-Jewish. He ruled that Christianity was Jewish, at least in its roots. Thus, Christianity had every right to exist, so long as it did not oppose Rome. And that protection continued until Nero became Caesar and began persecuting Christians around 64 AD.

The Jews were incensed. “And he drove them from the tribunal. And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.” (Acts 18:16–17, ESV) The Jews, angry that they had been ignored by Gallio, laid hold of Sosthenes and beat him, presumably because he had bungled the charges against Paul and not gotten the results they were looking for. As a result, it could be that this Sosthenes is the same one to whom Paul refers at the introduction of his first letter to the Corinthians and, as a result, had himself later become a follower of Christ. In any case, Paul was free to continue his ministry and the promise of Christ was fulfilled to the letter.

The encouragement that Jesus gave to him made a marked difference in Paul’s life. It really did. You can see it in the later words that he writes that follow his expression of his anguish over the Jews in Romans 9 when he writes: “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.” (Romans 9:6–8, ESV) And then in verses 15-16: “For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” (Romans 9:15–16, ESV) Then once more in verses 22-26: “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’ ” “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’ ”” (Romans 9:22–26, ESV)

As a result of Christ’s gracious intervention and shepherding of Paul’s soul, he was rejuvenated and reinvigorated and he came to understand more fully the ways of the Lord. He gave himself with renewed passion to making Christ known and he trusted that all who belonged to Christ since before the foundation of the world would repent and believe the gospel. A faithful but fearful servant was re-energized and restored to joyful ministry.

There are some really important themes in this text that I do not want us to miss. Though Paul was an Apostle in a way that we are not, God's way of dealing with him lays down some important principles for us.

First, this life we live with Christ, beloved, is not easy – it is filled with great joys and difficult trials. If Paul could be overtaken by fear, by discouragement, by doubt – we all can be. Sometimes things don't go the way that we think they should; sometimes things happen that are really hard. Paul's ministry was not a piece of cake. But Paul learned some things. It is out of this trial, I believe that Paul learned one of his greatest lessons. He wrote to the Philippians: "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13–14, ESV) To press on is not a casual thing. By faith in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, we keep pushing on, keep moving forward in following Christ. Taking our thoughts and mind captive to Christ, keeping ourselves alert and sensitive to the word of God and the instruction of the Word. Taking the time to regularly examine our hearts and motives and thinking and desires and actions and feelings in light of Christ. We must be zealous in prayer and cultivating a thirst for Christ – making it a practice of abiding in Him and fleeing to Him when it seems all around us is caving in. He will be our refuge.

Second, we have to see so clearly how much we need one another in the body of Christ. Our part in this body cannot be a casual or detached sort of thing. We do not simply worship in this church building; we are the church! You see how God surrounded Paul with Aquila and Priscilla, with Timothy and Silas. If Paul, the "pit-bull apostle" needed his brothers and sisters in Christ, how much more do we? We need the community of believers, relationships in this body that trump all others. We need to minister to other people and to be ministered to, especially when we are vulnerable. We need other people that we can turn to without suspicion, without the fear that we will be closed out if we are not a part of the "in group," without the fear of gossip. There is no "in group" in Christ – just one body. We need to love one another, keep short accounts, encourage and exhort one another and even more as we see the day of Christ approaching, bearing with one another in love, receiving each other gladly. We need brothers and sisters who will go into battle with us, who will minister in the name of Christ with us, who will make the name of Christ known with us. This only comes from life in the body of Christ on a local level, in the local church.

Third, and more than anything else, we need a constant, sustaining vision of Christ. We need, like Paul, to see Christ with the eyes of faith, to hear and heed the commands of Christ, to receive His correction with a glad heart, to hear and believe His promise never to leave nor to forsake us – to trust His heart and His power for us, to know that He will be with us and give us strength to endure until he calls us to Himself and to believe that His work through us to gather His elect is not done.

Proverbs 29:18 says: “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.” (Proverbs 29:18, ESV) In other words, where there is no prophetic vision the people “cast off moral restraint, become idle, become ungovernable, become stripped of their dignity and they lose their joy. So what is this prophetic vision? It is the vision of the supremacy of God, revealed in Christ in all things. It is the vision of the resplendent glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and all that is His to us and for us in God.

Beloved, do you see this reality today? The all-glorious Christ, who is faithful and true, is in the midst of us! He has come to touch and heal us, to command us, to rule us, and judge us. He has come to teach us, rebuke us, correct us, and train us. He has come to save us and bless us. He has come to hear our prayers and accept our praise. He has come to give us life, repentance, and faith.

Christ lives with us right now to make intercessions for us, to deliver us, to encourage us, to enable us to walk in the Spirit, to give us assurance that His death on the cross and resurrection were full payment for our sins, to build His unshakable Kingdom. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Draw near to the glorified Christ. If the eyes of your heart are open, you will see Him. If your ears are circumcised, you will hear Him. His voice will drown out all competing sounds. His appearance will overshadow all other personalities. His ministry will be excellent. The glorified Christ will not overlook your spiritual failings or progress. He will clarify your way, gladden your heart, and feed your soul.

Paul was changed by this vision of Christ. He was near to quitting – he really was – but he was changed...and we will be too. I cannot pretend to know how, but when we as we continue to embrace His glory in all of its fullness, he will change us. And the reality of His promise “I am with you,” will be stamped upon our souls.

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