

Acts of the Holy Spirit - 19
Persevering in Faith and Witness
Acts 18:1-17 - Week of September 24, 2018
Bay Park Life Groups – Leader

Whereas the Gospels tell us what Jesus began to do, Acts is the story of what Jesus continues to do through his Church. The early church in Acts grew because individual believers took joining Jesus' life, community and mission seriously. That's not to say it was easy. In Acts we find that Gospel success is often followed by significant pushback. So much so that even the seemingly fearless Apostle Paul ends up afraid and discouraged. What hope is there when our faith is not appreciated, when the voices of antagonism drown out the voices of reason and respect?

1. Finish one of the following:
 - What I love most about September is . . .
 - If I could relive one day this summer it would be . . .

Read Acts 18:1-8 together

2. *The city of Corinth was at the very narrow bridge of land (only 3 and a half miles wide) that connected the Peloponnese peninsula with the mainland of Greece to the north. It not only was at the center of the north-south trade route, but also of the east-west route. Goods could be brought to a port just to the east of Corinth and transported over land a few miles to a port to the west — this saved a 200 mile journey by ship around the south of the peninsula. As a result, Corinth was a major commercial and finance center. Like many urban centers based on business and wealth — Corinth became famous for a degree of corruption and immorality that was remarkable even for the ancient world. In classical Greek korintheazdo (literally, to “Corintheanize”) became a synonym for fornication. At the center of Corinth was the temple of Aphrodite, which employed thousands of female slave/priestesses who roamed the city as prostitutes.¹*

What challenges did preaching the Gospel in Corinth likely present? How did being a Christian in Corinth compare to being a Christian in Kingston?

3. In verse 8 we read that those who believed were baptized? This is a common occurrence in the early church (cf Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:15). Believers didn't wait months or years to publically profess their faith, rather it followed on the heels of their coming to faith. What do we learn about baptism from this text? What has your experience been with baptism?

We learn at least 2 things from this verse.

- Baptism doesn't save. Simply put, baptism follows belief and not vice versa.
- Baptism is vital. It was the first concrete and outward expression of an inner

¹ Tim Keller, *Evangelism: Studies in the book of Acts*, (Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2005) p 161

decision. Baptism models the truth that faith in Jesus is not just a private matter but meant to be lived out publicly (Mtt 28:18-20, 1 Cor 5:11-21).

As a Baptist church that's part of the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches of Canada, here's what our constitution says about baptism: *We believe that there are only two ordinances for the Church set forth in the New Testament:*

1. *Baptism which is the immersion of the believer in water, whereby the believer obeys Christ's command and identifies with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.*
2. *The Lord's Supper which is the memorial wherein the believer partakes of the two elements, bread and wine, which symbolize the Lord's body and shed blood, proclaiming His death until He comes*²

It's encouraging to note the relationship between baptism and communion.

Whereas baptism is a one-time individual act that points to the cross, communion is an ongoing corporate act that keeps us from forgetting the cross.

Here's a couple passages you might want to explore as a group – Rom 6:1-4, Gal 3:26-29. Be sure to offer follow-up for anyone who might have questions or is interested in baptism. Don't just skip over this discussion assuming it's understood by all. You and your group could very well play a key role in someone's spiritual growth by HUMBLY addressing the importance of baptism.

Read Acts 18:9-10

4. The success of v. 8 seems to clash with Paul's fear in v. 9. On Sunday we noted that Paul was battling the fear of inadequacy (cf 1 Cor 2:1-5) and of cultural climate. In the context of wealthy, sophisticated and sinful Corinth, Paul lost hope that God could use him. He was out of his league. Paul also lost hope that God could protect him. He was not in friendly territory. It's a crisis of hope (*Can God use and protect me?*) not a crisis of faith (*Does God even exist?*). Can you relate to Paul's fears? Where do you tend to lose hope most easily?

Paul's fears were not unrealistic. Crispus, the synagogue leader and his family had come to faith (v 8). This would have been viewed as high treason in the tight knit Jewish community. Likewise many Corinthians believed and were baptized. This too had the potential for much negative and unwanted attention, in the context of sin city Corinth (cf Acts 13:44-50; 14:1-5; 16:16-22; 17:11-15).

5. God's words to Paul contained both admonition (*Do not be afraid, keep on speaking, do not be silent*) and encouragement (*I am with you, I have many people in this city*). How do these admonitions and encouragements apply to you?

These verses remind us that:

- God doesn't call the gifted, he gifts the called (*Don't be afraid*).

² Constitution of Bay Park Baptist Church, IV Statement of Faith, 10 Ordinances.

- God wants us to be thermostats not thermometers (*Don't be silent*).
- Hope and perseverance is knowing *I am with you*.
- Hope and perseverance is knowing God is at work around us (*I have many people in this city*).

Tunnel vision causes us to hyper focus on our fears and projected outcomes. But God is always at work beyond what our eyes can perceive and souls imagine. The promise that God is with us takes us far beyond the realms of his omnipresence (present everywhere). This promise is akin to when as a child we had a nightmare only to wake to a parent sitting by our bed saying – *it's ok, I'm here, it's alright, you have nothing to fear*.

It is important though to note that the promise of God's presence and protection is not a blank check. We can't presume on God's grace that God will be present and protect even if we are disobedient or rebellious. God's special promise of presence and protection is for those who choose to trust in God despite their fears.

Read Acts 18:11-17

6. Paul stayed and as he anticipated, trouble broke out. But God remained true to his promises. What if Paul hadn't stayed, or if he had remained silent? How might that have impacted his faith and life? What encouragement can you draw for yourself from these verses?

It's interesting to note that:

- God didn't promise Paul he would never be hurt. In fact he had been before and was after.
- Unlike other times Paul didn't have to defend himself. Just as he started to speak, God intervened.
- Because Paul persevered he had the privilege of seeing and experiencing God's victory. Something his silence would have cut him short of.
- Experiencing God's presence and protection is what empowered Paul to face greater challenges and fears with courage and peace in the days to come (cf Acts 19 – 28). In many ways it prepared him for Rome!

The crowd turning on Sosthenes just goes to show how oppressive of an environment Corinth was and how old racism is (people seem to have used this as an opportunity to vent their hatred of Jews).