

Guest Preacher - Rev. Howard Stone (Retired)

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Preacher: Rev. Howard Stone

[0:00] Please turn back to Acts chapter 18. Thank you for the Apostle Paul.

Thank you for the transformation of his life from being a hateful Pharisee who rejected Jesus Christ to the greatest ambassador for the Lord Jesus.

We thank you for his missionary journeys. Thank you for how you blessed his work, bringing hundreds, perhaps thousands of people to know the Saviour. Thank you in your goodness you've recorded for us something of his work.

Your word is going to stand forever. It's stood for the last 2,000 years and it's going to continue forever. May it be for our blessing and encouragement as we reflect on these things.

We thank you for the presence of your Holy Spirit. It was he that carried Luke along when he wrote these words. He knows what they mean, what they teach, what lessons can be learned.

[1:31] And so we ask for the Spirit's help to reflect on these things, to benefit from them, to be able to share them with others and to see more of your greatness and glory.

Amen. Well, as I said earlier on, Paul had started this missionary journey up in the north of Greece. If you know the story of how he was going westwards through Turkey and he ends up in Troas. And he doesn't know what God wants him to do. The Spirit had prevented him to go up into the north of Turkey. While he's there, God gives him a vision of a man of Macedonia who is calling, come over to Macedonia and help us.

Paul obeys that vision. He goes over to Macedonia in the north of Greece. He works in Philippi. He goes on to Thessalonica and Berea.

[2:35] Comes to Athens. And now here he is in Corinth. He's been working his way down through what we would call Turkey today.

He comes to Corinth. Corinth is an important city. It's a trading city. There's a harbor there. There's a lot of business coming and going. It's a bustling place full of all kinds of philosophies as well. Because there's contact with other nations right about and there's lots of trade. There's all kinds of religions and ideas about spiritual things.

And along with that, there's immorality. There was a lot of immorality in Corinth. So it's into this context that Paul comes with the good news of Jesus Christ.

First of all, I want to consider Paul's concern for his own people. The Jews. Paul's concern for his own people. In verse 4 there, He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

[3:54] When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

The Jews were, and still are, God's own people. God had made a covenant with the descendants of Abraham.

You're to be my people and I will be your God. Not that they were better than any other nation. In fact, God, through Moses, tells them, That's not the reason why I chose you.

You're not a great nation. There's many nations greater and more powerful than you are. But out of his elective love, he chose Abraham and Abraham's descendants to be his own special people. And as a consequence, they had enjoyed God's blessing down through the centuries. They alone had the law of God. The Ten Commandments.

[4:55] Yes, the commands are written on the hearts of every human being. People know what is right and wrong. But only the Jews had God speaking to them from Mount Sinai.

Only they had the prophets. Only they had the history of God doing wonderful things for the nation. We were singing there at the end of that psalm.

Psalm 147. How Israel was the only nation that had been favored in this way. Paul was obviously a Jew. And he had a concern for his own Jewish people.

He wanted them to hear that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. The Jews had this expectation. There's going to be a man come from, appointed by God, who is going to bring blessing to the nation and to the world.

And he's going to establish a kingdom that's going to last forever. That was the promise to David. So there was this expectation. There's going to be this Christ.

[6:04] So Paul starts off with the Jews. Wherever he goes, he starts off with the Jews. He goes to the synagogue. They have all the background.

They have all the expectations. And he's able to key into that and say, this Jesus that I'm telling you about, this carpenter from Nazareth who died on a Roman cross and rose again, he is the Christ.

Paul did everything he could to persuade these Jews.

He went to the synagogue. He met with them there. He explained to them from the scriptures. Paul has such a wonderful knowledge and understanding of Old Testament scripture.

He would use every argument he could muster to persuade them that Jesus was the Christ, that they might believe and be saved.

[7:07] But for all that he did, he was rejected. So often he was rejected by his own people. As you read through his missionary journeys and acts, time after time after time, it's the Jews that reject him.

Some were saved. Undoubtedly, there were many who did believe, who were persuaded. But so often the opposition arose from his own people.

And in this context, he says really quite a terrible thing to them. He says, your blood be on your own head.

If you die in your sins, if you perish forever in hell, you are responsible for it. I have fulfilled my responsibility.

I have done everything I could to persuade you of the way of salvation. You have chosen to ignore it. And if you've suffered eternal judgment, then it's your fault.

[8:24] Paul did everything he could to persuade his own people. He had such a concern for them. Friends, are we concerned for our own people?

For our own families? For those we work with? Those we know in the community? Those we rub shoulders with day by day?

How concerned are we for these people that they would hear the gospel of Jesus Christ? Israel was so blessed to be chosen by God and to have the truth of God, the laws of God, in a way that no other nation was blessed.

But friends, our land has been so blessed with the truth of God. It's been there for hundreds of years.

You may know the motto of the city of Glasgow. Let Glasgow prosper. That's not the whole motto. It's actually let Glasgow prosper by the preaching of his word.

[9:43] That's the Christian heritage that our land has been blessed with. People have Bibles in their homes that may not be read. They've got church buildings in their communities.

They can come. If people don't believe, it will be their responsibility. Their blood will be on their own heads.

But how concerned are we that these people hear what Jesus can do for them? how their lives can be transformed?

How they can have hope for the future? Paul longed to see his own people saved. Do we have that longing that people would be saved, that they would know God for themselves through Jesus Christ?

Let's go on. Let's go on. See next, Paul's effectiveness in sharing the gospel. Paul's effectiveness in sharing the gospel.

[10:47] In verse 7, And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justice, a worshiper of God. That term, worshiper of God, means here's someone who wasn't a Jew, but he was involved with Jewish worship.

He would attend the synagogue. He recognized that the Jews had got something special, that their God was the true God. So that's where Paul went.

He went to Titius Justice. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord. Here's a Jew. He's a leader in the synagogue. He's been saved together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized. So many of the Jews had actually opposed Paul.

They didn't want to hear what Paul was preaching. But there were others who were saved. They accepted the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection.

[12:00] This was their Messiah. This was the Christ they were waiting for. And through him, they could have forgiveness of sin and everlasting life.

Crispus and his whole household are saved. And the Corinthians, many of them must have been Gentiles.

They weren't Jews. They heard and they were saved. And they were baptized. Luke doesn't often tell us about those who believe being baptized.

It's not clear why he actually mentions it here. We can assume that that's what happened when people believed they were baptized because that's what Jesus had told us to do.

As you go, make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism was a sign.

[13:03] It is a sign. It still is a sign of forgiveness, washing, the sin that has been dealt with, but it's also a sign of belonging to the new covenant.

It follows on from the old covenant sign of circumcision. Plainly, circumcision was only for boys. baptism, but baptism in line with the expansion of the gospel after the ascension of Jesus is for men and women.

As this sign, you belong to the covenant community of God. These people, different backgrounds, Jews, Gentiles, rich, poor, sinful people or upstanding people in the community, they've all been baptized.

They've all had that mark. They now belong to the community of God's people, saved by faith in Jesus. Friends, that's the same today.

[14:13] That's why we baptize youngsters because it's a sign if they're born into a Christian home, they belong to the covenant community. It doesn't save them, but they grow up with the expectation that they will believe themselves and be part of God's people.

Or if we have people who've come to faith in adulthood, they are baptized. They haven't been baptized before as a sign. Now they've been forgiven.

Now they belong to the people of God. So that's what's happening in Corinth. People are believing Paul is being effective in spreading the gospel.

However, it wasn't Paul, was it? In verse 8, we read many of the Corinthians hearing, well, it's translated here as hearing Paul believed.

Actually, the word Paul doesn't appear in the original, in the Greek New Testament. These Corinthians, they heard, they heard.

[15:32] It wasn't about Paul. They heard what Paul was proclaiming, the word, the word of God. and as they hear the word, they believe and they're saved.

Paul is, well, when he writes to the Corinthians, in fact, he's keen to point out to the Corinthians there that he's just a servant.

We read in the end of the chapter there about Apollos. Apollos went to Corinth as well and was wonderfully used by God there. But Paul is quick to point out, we're just servants.

I planted, Apollos watered, but it was God that gave the increase. God made things grow. So while we can say Paul was wonderfully used by God, he saw the conversion of hundreds, perhaps thousands of people, there's a sense in which you and I are no different from the Apostle Paul. We're simply servants. We're message boys and girls. We're bringing the truth of Jesus, telling people about Jesus and expecting God to apply it to people's hearts and lives.

[16:56] I have a friend in Castletown who has a pretty chaotic life. God's love.

But I did have opportunity to speak to him about Jesus. I did my best to present the gospel to him. But from all, from outward appearance, nothing has changed.

He has no understanding of it or appears to have no understanding of it. God will be saved. to depend on God himself. That if he is to be saved, God himself will be at work and transform his thinking and apply the truth of Jesus.

You and I, if we're following the Lord Jesus, we have the same responsibility as Paul. Tell others about Jesus. God will use that truth to bring others to himself.

Let's go on. We see next Paul's encouragement from the Lord. Paul's encouragement from the Lord.

[18:15] Verse 9, And the Lord, that is the Lord Jesus, 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. What sort of picture did you have of the Apostle Paul?

I wouldn't be surprised if you think of him as this courageous, fearless evangelist who is willing to stand up in any circumstance and speak about Jesus.

that doesn't seem to have been the case, in Corinth at least, because here is the Lord Jesus appearing in a vision specially for Paul, specially to deal with the fear that Paul was feeling. Jesus comes to him and says, don't be afraid. You are afraid. Don't be afraid. So even the great Apostle Paul, there were occasions where he felt scared to speak about Jesus, scared of the consequences of testifying to the Lord.

[19:46] it. And Jesus specially, graciously appears to him in this vision and says, don't be afraid. Paul, as we said, knew his Old Testament.

That was all the scripture they had at this point. And he would have known that God says so often in the Old Testament, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.

don't fear. And he says as well, so often, I'm with you. I will never forsake you. And yet Paul needs, or God, Jesus graciously gives this encouragement to the Apostle Paul.

He doesn't simply leave Paul needing, dependent on the written scripture, which Paul knew so well. In his love and his grace towards the apostle, he says, I'm with you.

Don't be afraid. Go on speaking. But there's more in the message from Jesus.

[21:00] He says, go on speaking. No one's going to attack you or harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people. Jesus did not mean that there are lots of Christians there already.

He meant there are lots of people whom I have chosen, who when they hear the good news of Jesus, they're going to be saved and they will become my people.

Paul, when he's writing to the Ephesians, by the Spirit, he describes them as those who are elect before the foundation of the world. That's one of the most amazing truths of the Bible, that if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, God chose you before he even made the world.

That's what Jesus is saying to Paul here. I have got people out there in the community in Corinth who are going to be saved, but they need to hear the gospel, so go on speaking.

Don't be afraid. Tell people about Jesus whenever you have the opportunity. And as people hear that good news, they will be saved, they will respond, they will be born again.

[22:25] The Spirit through Paul says in the letter to the Romans, faith comes by hearing. How did you come to faith? If you're following the Lord Jesus tonight, how did you come to faith?

Somebody told you. Whether it was someone preaching, whether it was someone giving you a Bible or a tract, or something that was spoken to you in conversation, or you grew up in a Christian home, and your parents taught you the truth, somebody told you.

faith comes to hear. heard, the point came when you believed it. Faith comes by hearing. So although it's tempting to say, well, if God has got his people out there, they'll be saved anyway.

There's nothing we can do. that's not how we apply that truth. Rather, we can be encouraged to say, there are people that God has chosen who are yet to be saved, who have yet to come to faith, but they need to hear.

And it's as they hear it from you, or as you share your own testimony with others, or as you share tracts or Christian books, they will learn the gospel, and they will come to faith.

[23:58] The work of evangelism is not a hopeless task. People are going to be saved. The church is going to flourish.

It's going to grow. Paul was told by Jesus here, there are many in that city.

Now, we can't take that and apply it to our own situation and say, there are many in these communities, in our own community, in my community, in yours. But we can have that assurance that there are at least some.

There may yet be many. But be encouraged. Go on speaking. Go on telling people about Jesus.

speaking. And you will see, by God's grace, people being saved and born again. People showing evidence that they have been elect according to God's gracious will.

[25 : 01] people. So Paul was told, don't be afraid. Go on speaking. I've got people out there. Same message comes to me.

Same message to you. Go on speaking. Go on praying for those you witness to. Tell them about Jesus because there are some out there that God has chosen and who will come to face.

But then finally, notice Paul's obedience to his commission. In verse 11, he stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God among them.

Paul was encouraged by this vision of Jesus and he obeyed. Jesus had told him, don't be afraid. So Paul had to actively say, right, I'm not going to be afraid.

Jesus has told me, he's with me. So I can banish those fears. Jesus has told me to go on speaking. And I must go on speaking.

[26 : 16] And he did. For a year and a half. if you see, if you look at some of the other places that Paul went, he seems to have been there only a matter of months, sometimes just weeks before opposition was such that he was chased away.

But here he stays for a year and a half preaching the good news of Jesus. And consequently, the church is established.

there's a Christian community established in Corinth. We don't know how big it was, but I get the impression it was substantial.

When you read the letter addressed to the Corinthians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, I used to think of one fellowship, one church, as we think of churches today.

I don't think it was like that. I think there were many communities, fellowships of God's people throughout the city, hundreds of people who had come to faith.

[27 : 29] Jesus had said, I've got many people in this place. There were hundreds who were born again, who were saved, who were taken out of their godless paganism, and were brought to faith in Jesus Christ, who were made holy, set apart for God, as a consequence of what they heard from Paul.

Then we can say what blessing has come to us and to the Christian church ever since, because Paul writes these letters to the Corinthian church, 1 and 2 Corinthians.

If there had been no church in Corinth, there would have been no letters to the Corinthians. God in his goodness established that church there.

Use Paul to write subsequently these wonderful letters, and they've been a blessing, they've been used by God for 2,000 years ever since. The Lord was with him.

Jesus kept his work. He was faithful to his promise to Paul, and Paul obeyed.

[28 : 52] Friends, the same is true for me, for you. We must obey the commands that the Lord gives us. We were thinking a little of that this morning. But in this context, what about the Great Commission?

Jesus says, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Jesus is king of this universe. He's in charge of your life.

He's in charge of the people that you interact with. He knows everything about everything, life. And he's got the power to change situations, to change lives, to change hearts and minds.

things. But he does it through his people. And so he said, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. As you go, make disciples.

He was talking to the disciples when he said that. But I think it was the occasion where more than 500 of the brothers and sisters saw Jesus alive.

[30 : 07] It was a general instruction to ordinary believers. Go and make disciples. Well, there was no instruction actually to go.

The instruction was make disciples. But Jesus says, as you go, as you go out into the world, as you interact with people in your workplace, in your community, in your home, as you go, make disciples. Friends, we must obey that commission, mustn't we? We've got an impossible task. I can't change anyone. You can't change anyone.

Paul couldn't change anyone. But faith comes by hearing. And as you speak the gospel to those around you, God may in his grace change hearts and lives.

That's what he did for you. That's what he did for me. And we've got this assurance. He is with us. The Lord Jesus has promised, even in that great commission, look at this, he says, I'm with you to

the end of the age.

[31:28] Paul then, in Corinth, he had showed his concern for his own people. Paul was effective in sharing the gospel.

Paul was encouraged by the vision that Jesus gave him. and Paul was obedient to his commission. May God encourage us through his word.

May it be a blessing to us and in turn bring blessing to others. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, you at this moment are enthroned in heaven at the Father's right hand.

You have done everything that is necessary for the salvation of everyone who believes. you've given us this responsibility and we do feel our inadequacy and weakness and fear in sharing the good news with others.

We pray that in your grace you would give us opportunities to do that, that you would empower us by your spirit, that you would fill us with your Holy Spirit, so that the words we speak may be more than just what we come up with, but that they would be your truth, empowered by the Spirit himself.

[32:51] Lord, we bless you that we have the freedom to evangelize. No one's going to lock us up, no one's going to harm us, no one's going to persecute us, but still we sometimes feel fearful about speaking about Jesus.

give us the strength, the courage, the boldness to proclaim your truth boldly. And may it be a means that you use to transform the lives of many, many we know, many we love, many we've been praying for, that your church might grow and flourish and that you yourself would be honoured.

Amen. Let's conclude by singing Psalm 27 in the older version. It's page 236.

Psalm 27. The Lord's my light in saving health and is my salvation, who shall make me dismayed. My life strength is the Lord, of whom then shall I be afraid.

Let's sing one to five. The Lord's my light and saving health, who shall make me dismayed.

[34:33] My life's red, this the heart of fear, then shall I be afraid.

Where does my enemy stand for the most wicked persons of all?

To eat my flesh against the most, this the world undefined.

Against me, though I'm rose and crown, my heart in fear and sin.

Though war against me, rise, I will be confident in this.

[35:53] One thing I know that I desire, I will seek to obtain.

That all days of my life I fear within God's hearts remain.

That I, the beauty of the Lord, behold me and admire.

I'm not I in this holy place, may reverently inquire.

For here in his pavilion shall be high, here he will be.

[37:14] In secret of this heavenly high, and on our own me raise.

Let's close. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.

Amen. Thank you.