

Corinth

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[0 : 00] Hi, I'm Ava Manson, and I'm going to be reading from Psalm 121, a song of ascents. Now I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will need to slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life.

The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore. Today's reading is from Acts chapter 18, verses 1 to 17.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquilo, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.

[1 : 07] Paul went to see them, and because he was a tent maker, as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath, he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justice, a worshipper of God.

Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord. And many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. One night, the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision.

Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.

[2 : 21] So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. While Galileo was pro-council of Ashera, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.

This man, they charged, is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law. Just as Paul was about to speak, Galileo said to them, If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you.

But since it involves questions and words and names, your own law, settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things. So he drove them off.

Then the crowds there turned on Sosthenes, the synagogue leader, and beat him in front of the pro-council. And Galileo showed no concern whatever.

Now let us pray for Graham as he comes to talk to us about this passage. Dear Lord, we thank you for this wonderful day. We thank you for the gift of your word. Lord, please bless Graham as he will speak to us now about the verses we read.

[3 : 35] Please be with him as he helps us to know you. Lord, speak to us through him and help us to hear you. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, good morning, everyone.

It is wonderful to have you with us. Please, can I invite you to grab a Bible and come with me to Acts chapter 18. So we've been following the Apostle Paul on one of his missionary journeys, where he's been speaking about Jesus.

He's been proclaiming the gospel and he's been planting churches in what we know today as Europe. Now, just as we get into this passage today, let me tell you what sports scientists will tell you.

So they'll tell you that there's often a feeling that marathon runners get. They encounter roughly about the 20 mile mark in their run. And they call this feeling, they call it hitting the wall.

Now, some of you might know what that is like, right? You hit the wall. You're emotionally spent. You're physically done in. Your enthusiasm is sapped.

[4 : 41] You're mentally fried. You're done. And everything in you is telling you, I just want to stop. Right? You know that feeling?

I just want to stop. Now, here's what we need to understand as we dive into this passage today. Because what seems highly likely, Acts chapter 18, is that the Apostle Paul has hit the wall.

Right? He's hit the wall. He is greatly discouraged as we meet him here in this passage. Now, let me make an educated guess as to why he's maybe feeling like that.

You see, he arrives in Corinth with his mind looking in two directions. Right? It's looking back the way. And it's remembering what's happened to him in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

You can check that out in just the pages before. In these places, in these cities where he's tried to tell people about Jesus. Right? What's happened to him? Opposition. Rejection.

[5 : 45] Questions. Beatings. Mockings. And prison. I mean, you put that all together. That's going to take its toll on a guy. Right? And his mind is also looking out in front.

And he's looking out at this city called Corinth. Right? Corinth. It's the biggest city in Greece at this point in time. You know, they reckon that Athens, in this day, had about 10,000 people.

Corinth? Probably you're looking at 700,000 people. Right? It's a huge city. It's a commercial city because of where it sits geographically.

It's a trade city. It's a wealthy city. The goddess of love. She lives in Corinth. So you can understand, join the dots there, that it's a highly sexualized city.

It's a city where people love power. They love eloquence. They love a party and a Friday night. Somebody called Corinth the Las Vegas of the first century.

[6 : 49] Got to understand that the song that's blasting out from the speakers as you enter this city is the one from that musical. Do you remember it? Anything goes. Do you know what?

See, the Corinthians, they've got a reputation for this kind of life. Right? Because to Corinthianize, it's a little joke in this day. It's a way of saying that somebody is into wild living.

Right? We talked today, I was trying to think of this. We talked today maybe about an Essex lad or an Essex girl. Right? It's that kind of thing. And Paul is standing in Corinth in this city.

And the only thing he's going on in there with, the only card that he's got to play, the only card that he's willing to play is the message about a crucified man who has died for sins and calls the world to repent.

Right? How do you think that's going to go down in Corinth? So you bring this all together. You bring it all together. There's two words in his mind. Really simply, stop speaking.

[8 : 01] Because life would get a whole lot easier if he stopped speaking. So let me ask you, what do you say to somebody who's hit the wall? Giving up or thinking of giving up on living and speaking for Jesus.

Now here's the thing. We have all been there. Right? I know I've been there. We have all been there. Discouraged. In our Christian lives. Maybe some of us are there right now.

All sorts of things can cause us to think about giving up. Right? My flatmates, they think I'm a space cadet. My family just think I'm going through a phase.

My teammates, they won't want to know. My colleagues will just find the gospel, the Christian message offensive. We can be tempted to be discouraged and give up. So what do you say to somebody who's hit the wall?

Well, it's into this situation that Jesus speaks. Which, if you've got the text there, is striking.

[9 : 02] Right? Because the last time in the book of Acts that Jesus is recorded as speaking is way back in chapter 10. So these words from Jesus, they stand out in terms of the flow of this book.

And Jesus, knowing the heart and the mind of his apostle, he speaks words of truth about who he is deep into Paul's soul.

Encouraging him to keep on speaking. So the key verses for us today in this text are verses 9 and 10.

This is where the money is. If you've got a pen handy, underline it. Mark it. Highlight it. This is where it is. Here's what Jesus says to Paul. He says, do not be afraid. Which tells you what? It tells you he was afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. There's what Jesus says.

[10:03] And it might sound a bit harsh until you see the two wonderful reasons why Jesus gives Paul that he should keep speaking.

And I hope these encourage us today as we think about taking the good news of Jesus to a world that desperately needs to hear about him. And this gets us back in the game of speaking for him. Here's the two reasons. The first is the promise of his presence. Do you see it? Jesus says to Paul, he says those words, I am with you.

There's the promise. So Jesus has got him. Jesus will protect him. Jesus will care for him. Jesus will provide for him. And let me just pick out a few of the ways that Luke tells us how Jesus delivered on that promise.

Okay. Do you see how Jesus brings into Paul's path right at the beginning of this chapter? He brings into his path just some good friends. Right. Verse one. I love these guys.

[11:07] Priscilla and Aquila. Aquila. This husband and wife team. And see how we're told in the text about what their life has been like up until this point.

Do you see how it is not being all rainbows and unicorns for these guys? They have recently arrived in Corinth from Rome. That's what the text tells us. So what's going on here is that Claudius, the emperor in Rome, has got fed up of what he thought was an internal fight amongst the Jews.

Okay. So the Christians are very much considered part of Judaism at this point in time. And they're squabbling. They're fighting over what historians tell us is about this man, Christ.

Okay. They are disagreeing sharply over Jesus. Just shows you what kind of impact Christians were making in Rome at this time. Claudius has got fed up with this and he's booted a lot of them out of Rome.

So here are a couple then. If you put that together. Here are a couple who are effectively Christian refugees. Who have traveled from Rome to Corinth. Which is a considerable distance in search of a new life.

[12:22] Right. And that is tough. Just imagine those kind of conversations as these two are traveling together. You ever had questions like this in your mind? What is God up to? What's he doing here?

What's his purpose in all of this? You ever ask those kind of questions? I know I have. And all of a sudden, who do they meet? They meet this man called Paul.

Paul. Who just so happens to be of the same faith as them. And just so happens to be in the same trade as them. Do you see how we're told in the text that they all make tents.

This is what they do. This is what brought them together. And it just so happens that they bump into Paul. Coincidence? I think not. Priscilla and Aquila.

Do you see, we're just the friends that Paul needs. The gospel companions. The guys who encouraged him to keep going in ministry.

[13:24] And when you get the text, you throw into the mix there. Silas and Timothy. Paul's gospel companions as well who arrive in Corinth. And you get the sense of what Jesus is up to here. What's he doing?

He's encouraging his servant through his people. Now, how true is that? How good a gift are good Christian friends?

You know, my wife and I, we've got two friends in Edinburgh. We love nothing more than to have a takeaway and a laugh with them on a Saturday night. Do you know what nickname we give them? We call them the Radiators.

Which now that I've said it like that, that sounds like the worst wrestling tag team name ever, doesn't it really? But that's what we call them, the Radiators. And here's why we call them it.

Because when we spend time with them, do you know what happens?

They heat us up. They get us going. They refresh us. They make us laugh. We cry together. We share hard times. But most of all, they encourage us to keep running the race for Jesus.

[14:28] Good friends. Let me ask you, who can you be a friend to at the minute with the express aim of encouraging them to keep running and keep speaking for Jesus?

See what's going on here? Who's in control of Corinth? Who's in control in Corinth, rather? Jesus is in control in Corinth. So keep on speaking, Paul.

Keep on going. And do you see how he did just that in the text, verse 4? He's still at it. He's still going to the synagogue. And we get these words that we've seen over the last few chapters, what he's doing.

He's reasoning. And he's persuading. So he's saying, here is the Old Testament. Here is Jesus. And here's how it's all about and all pointing to him. And do you know what?

His speaking continued to get him in trouble. So, verse 12. So the Jews in Corinth, they hear what he's saying and they hate it. And they really go for it.

[15:29] I mean, they up the game here in terms of their bid to see him silenced. Do you see where they take it? They take it to the proconsul. Right? This is no small claims court.

And this is no Judge Judy that Paul's been hauled up in front of here. This is the top judge in the top court. Who at this point in time is this man called Galio.

History tells us that he's in this position roughly about AD 51 to 52. Which is a side note. It's a wonderful, important detail which helps us historically date this event.

Galio is the man who hears this case against Paul. And Galilo is the man who throws it out because he sees that there is absolutely no foundation to it.

And you've got to see here that that is a huge result for the church. Because it establishes the principle in the eyes of the watching world that these early Christians, they're not going against Roman law as they worship and speak about Jesus.

[16:37] Right? Because you made no mistake. See if this verdict goes the other way. And there's a very different story for this church in Corinth at this point in time. Which is a side note.

It's why we should be very thankful to the Lord for living where we do. And having freedom of religion and freedom of speech as rights to enjoy.

And it's why we should be concerned if ever those rights are jeopardized. Not just for our sake, but actually for our society's sake. But again, do you see what's happening here? Who's in control in Corinth?

Jesus is in control. And the second reason to keep on speaking is the promise of his people. What does Jesus declare at the end of verse 10?

And I love this, right? This is brilliant. What does he declare? For I have many in this city who are my people.

[17:40] Now let's do a little bit of work here. Here's the thing to see. As far as we know, there isn't a single Christian in Corinth when Paul arrives there. Right? None.

So it's not like Jesus has slipped Paul a copy of the yellow pages here. And says, just look at the Christian section under C. Right? You'll find the names of my people there. I've got tons of people in this city.

It's not what he means. So what does he mean? Well, he's talking about the people in this city.

Who, when they hear the message of the gospel, they will believe it.

Because Jesus has his hand on them. Now let me just maybe try and tease that out a bit and show you how this works.

I don't know if you remember doing this kind of science experiment at school. I remember doing this one. You took a glass half full of water and you poured in some iron fillings.

[18:43] Right? And you mixed the thing around. And then after about 10 seconds or so of mixing it around, what you did when the water stilled is you just held over the top and around the side.

You just held a magnet. And what happened? The water stayed exactly where it was. But the iron fillings, they came straight to the top.

You see, that is the kind of thing that Jesus is talking about here. Jesus has his people. And notice the personal pronoun there.

He has got his people in Corinth. And they will respond when the shepherd calls and the sheep respond to his voice. And do you know what?

That doesn't stop Paul preaching. That compels Paul to preach. Do you see it? He keeps on going. And many reject his message. Right? Do you see that? Paul makes it clear, verse 6, that they are responsible for that decision.

[19:41] Right? You've got minds. You can make up your decision. And you've decided to reject him. That is your call. But do you know what? It seems that in this city, there were quite a few iron

fillings.

You want to meet some of them? Come with me. Right? Verse 7. Here's an iron filling. This man called Titius Justice. Right? What is he? He's a worshiper of God.

So he hears the gospel. He hears the message about Jesus. And he believes. And he invites Paul to come and stay with him at his home. Which is likely the venue for this little house church as it meets in Corinth.

And it's a venue which is next door. To where? To the synagogue. Well, that's got to make life a little bit awkward, has it not? Not many get to know your neighbors.

Street barbecues going down on synagogue street, I'd imagine. What makes it even more awkward is verse 8. Christmas. The ruler of the synagogue.

[20 : 44] He too hears. And he and his family believe. Now you've got to say that's a Leicester city 5,000 to 1 outside shot. Isn't it? For who would become a Christian in this place?

That's a surprising move. But then again, this is Jesus. He has his people in this city. But make no mistake that this is a costly move for Christmas and his family.

Right? To give up. Imagine having that conversation at home. Willing to risk giving up your job.

Willing to risk giving up perhaps your source of income.

And losing, probably most importantly in this culture, your reputation in the community. You know, you often hear stories. I've heard lots of them actually. Today from members of, for example, the scientific community.

Who talk about this kind of thing when they come to believe in Jesus. But clearly it's worth it for Christmas. Why? Because it's true.

[21 : 45] Right? No other reason why you would do this other than it's true. And see how Luke adds at the end of verse 8. And many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

Why? Because Jesus has many people in this city who are his people. And you know what? As I've chewed on this truth this week, it's really thrilled my soul.

And I'll tell you why. Because it's helped remind me again of the thought that I was in Jesus' mind. Way before he was in mine.

In fact, I was in his. And this is what the Bible would say about all those who would call themselves Christians. That we were his even before the foundation of the world. You know what that tells me? It tells me that this shepherd has me. He's got me. And he'll never let me go. Maybe you're watching this today. And never in a million years did you think that you would be watching a church service.

[22 : 52] And yet, here you are. Or maybe you're here and do you know what? If you're honest, you've wandered from the Lord Jesus over the years.

Maybe this crisis has prompted you to tune back in when you've got a good opportunity. And here you are. Could it be that Jesus is putting his hand on your life right now?

And he's calling you to come to him. Jesus says, go on speaking. Go on speaking.

Because I've got many people in this city. And I hope that encourages us to keep on speaking for him. Do you know what?

Also, there's wonderful freedom to be found in this. Wonderful freedom and encouragement to take risks in speaking for him. Because we can take those risks in the full knowledge that we can trust Jesus with the results.

[23 : 55] Again, who is in control in Corinth? Do you know what? Let's bring it forward to today. Who's in control in Edinburgh? Answer?

Jesus is in control. You know, just as we close, some of you might have seen it in the news this week. A man called Ravi Zacharias. Right?

One of the greatest Christian apologists, certainly of our generation. And he gave his life to helping people understand that the Christian faith and dealing with many objections.

Just a wonderful servant. And he went home to be with the Lord on Tuesday of this week. After a long, long battle with cancer. Now, the man must have spoken at hundreds of events and to millions of people throughout his lifetime about Jesus.

And I loved reading the stories about him that were pouring in on social media this week. From some of the people that he worked alongside. And do you know one article that I read? And I just want to share this with you.

[24 : 58] Was from a man called Alistair McGrath. Who said this about what he perceived made Ravi Zacharias tick. And what kept him enduring in his ministry.

And he said this. It was this fact. That Christianity makes rational sense on the one hand. And is able to offer deeply satisfying existential answers to life's grand questions on the other. Right? Bit of a mouthful. But here's what he's saying. He's saying that what kept Ravi Zacharias going. Was his soul was deeply satisfied with the one who calls himself the way, the truth, and the life.

Right? His soul was satisfied with Jesus. And who he is. And what he says is true. And his promises. Do you know what?

What do you say to somebody who has hit the wall? Where do you and I run, friends, when we're discouraged? Where do we go when we're tempted to tap out? Do you know what? There's only one place that we can go.

[26 : 10] We run to Jesus. And we ask that he would be so gracious and that the spirit would soak our souls in the joy of knowing who he is.

And the words of John Newton. How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear. It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds.

And it drives away our fears. Amen. Let me pray. So, Lord, whoever we are today.

And wherever we are with you. And maybe whatever is going on in our lives. Father, I pray that you would help all of us to know the all-surpassing joy of knowing Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life.

And help us to be those who are earnest in speaking and living for him. And it's in his precious and worthy name that we pray.

[27 : 19] Amen. Thank you, Graham. One of the things we've been doing after our sermons the last few weeks is hearing stories from some of our members and how they came to know Jesus.

And if you've missed any of those, they're all on our website and they're all on our YouTube channel. And it would be great for you to check those out. What we thought we'd do this morning is we'd listen to one of our members and how they are sharing the gospel further afield.

And hear the stories of what other ministries are doing around the world to share that good news of Jesus that we've been thinking about. So, listen in to Mike and his testimony and his video of what he is doing in his work to share the good news of Jesus.

Hi, everyone. I hope you're all keeping safe and that your trust in our Lord continues to grow and deepens every day as we face these very unprecedented times.

As you know, I work for Latin Link, a community with a calling, a Christian organization who focuses on developing opportunities of service between Latin America and the UK.

[28 : 32] These times for us have been very challenging. After having to cancel almost all our events and church visits for the rest of the year and having to suspend the sending of more volunteers going to serve in Latin America this year, we also have to bring home a decent bunch of volunteers who are unable to be at our projects and are somewhere close.

Things in Latin America aren't good either. There is a rapid increase of the spread of the virus in a number of cases and a lot of people have died. Their lockdown has been low and more severe than ours.

In so many ways, it helped to stow the spread of the virus, but it also moved people into desperation. After finding themselves unable to go to work, unable to get money and provide for their families, governments have tried to help with some support schemes.

But it has proven to be very difficult to help everyone. As almost half of Latin America's economy is informal, with people living hand-to-mouth, basically working day to eat tomorrow.

As a result of that, in many countries, the lockdown was breached, exposing people to the virus into more death, aggravating our already deteriorated public health system.

[29 : 50] countries like Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru had been heavily impacted. My own hometown in Peru, Iquitos, has been struggling a lot.

It is believed that between 60 to 80 percent of the town has got the virus. I have seen friends, friends, family, people I know who have got the virus and who have suddenly, some of them, die as a result of this.

So the urgency of medical supplies and oxygen is still big at the moment. And we know that the impact will last for a while. Latin Link has produced some videos to tell you more about it from our

people who are there.

If you have time, you can just find it in this following link. The link will appear here, hopefully. And also, if you would like to help, there are ways to do it. And you can just find ways to help out in this way through the Latin Link website.

Now, on the personal level, as my church engagement has been put on hold for the year, I'm now adjusting to working from home fully while looking after Tiago at the same time.

[31 : 01] As you may know, he's nursery and all nurseries in his garden have been closed. And I have used this opportunity to start running Bible studies in Spanish. Well, I was already running a Bible study in Spanish here in town, which was formed with Latinos in Edinburgh and parts of Spain.

And another one now has been formed with Latinos in the U.S., Paraguay, Colombia, and people from my own hometown in a few different places in Peru.

And we're just joining together, either through WhatsApp or through Zoom. And this has proven to be very exciting and useful for us, as most of the people involved are from churches or places that they don't have the resources, or perhaps people with the skill that we have in our own church, to stream a service in the weekly basis.

So some of these people, like many in Latin America, haven't been to a service or listened to a sermon preached to them for more than eight weeks since the lockdown started.

We have seen a couple of them coming to faith, which is a great scene. It's something very exciting that this lockdown has produced. So please, I ask you, continue to pray for Latin America.

[32 : 11] Continue to pray for the impact that the virus is having there. Pray for the believers who came to meet and haven't actually here. A service who cannot see their brothers and sisters for a while. And it's been more than eight weeks now in most of those places.

Pray for the people in our Bible studies, that they continue to grow and depend on Jesus as well.

And also, if you have the opportunity to give, please consider to do that. I already shared to you the links that you can do.

And also, please continue to give in our own church as well, because our church can find ways to help out and continue to serve in this time. Thank you very much and continue to enjoy the service. Thank you.