

Promises!

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[0 : 00] Now I'm going to kind of loosely stick to chapter 18 of Acts this evening. Kind of generally just for a little while, speaking about the church in Corinth and relating it to the church in Edinburgh and our responsibility to reach out with the Gospel in Edinburgh.

We are placed, I know there's some visitors with us tonight, but most of us are placed in Edinburgh here. It's a vibrant city, it's a secular city, it's a post-kind of Christian city, I guess in many ways.

There's not many churches, there's not many Christians, there's not many believers in the city of Edinburgh. And some people might ask the question, well why bother with Edinburgh? They've had their opportunity with the Gospel.

They come from a great Christian heritage. Let's go somewhere else now with the Gospel. Nobody in Edinburgh will come to faith in Jesus Christ.

I think if Paul was here, he would say, are you kidding? Are you kidding? This is a great place to go out with the Gospel. And Paul would probably say, it's pretty like Corinth.

[1 : 21] When I went out with the Gospel, there's not that much difference. Corinth was a place where you probably wouldn't have chosen to go with the Gospel.

If you had your choice, if you knew the kind of places that you could have gone, it was a centre of culture. Not unlike Edinburgh. The Asmian games there.

There was 1,000 prostitutes working in the city of Corinth. It was a political capital. It was pagan. It was diverse. And the great thing about that is that it was ripe for the Gospel.

That people went into Corinth. Paul went into Corinth with the Gospel. And with the promises of God behind him. And he took the Gospel in a real and in a radical way there, powerfully.

And many people came to faith in Jesus Christ. And I just want to highlight 4 things very quickly this evening. 4 things about Paul's attitude and Paul's character that he used.

[2 : 27] And it was significant as he went out with the Gospel in Corinth. And I hope it can characterise our church, our congregation here in the city centre of Edinburgh.

And also characterise our individual lives as believers in this city. And that we would seek God's help to do that. And I'm going to do it by kind of sometimes pooling some statements from the letters that Paul wrote to Corinth to the church that was founded.

Because that helps sometimes to ground a little bit. We're not told much about what Paul did in Corinth in this passage that we read in Acts. But we have from his letters much more detail about his relationship with the people and his attitudes that he went out with.

And the first thing I just want to say is speak about his single-minded faith. Paul went out with great single-minded faith in the Lord Jesus Christ into this pagan city with the Gospel.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 2 he said, For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[3 : 40] I came to you with much weakness and fear, with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might rest on men's wisdom, not on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

He had a really single-minded faith and that's the faith and that's the thinking that he went out with you. I resolved to know nothing in terms of his Gospel message with him except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Because he recognized that was an absolutely radical and powerful message. It was the only message of salvation. It was this fleshed God, it was this incarnate God who comes and who lives the life and who dies the death and who is resurrected on the third day and who is ascended to heaven.

And that this Christ says, I am the way, the truth and the life as we mentioned this morning, as we saw this morning. And he is the one who came to bring life.

That was the good news. That was the Gospel message. You can be forgiven. You can be redeemed. You can be bought back. You can know God in relationship. You can live eternally.

[4 : 53] You can know meaning and significance through a relationship with God and Jesus Christ. And you can know soul life, the life of God coursing through your soul and into your being.

Power of Christ is single-minded faith. Know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Tremendously relevant and completely significant for ourselves to have that same single-minded faith.

We know that it was rejected by many people that he went out with the Gospel to preach to. The Jews didn't want anything to do with it. Many of the Greeks didn't want anything to do with it. We recognise that and we know that.

He said, you know, he chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things because not many were wise by human standards. Not many were influential.

Not many were of noble birth. Many people did reject that message in Corinth. And many people will continue to reject that message today. But many people also came to faith.

[6 : 02] Those who felt a spiritual emptiness. Those who needed that Gospel of hope and of forgiveness. Those who were honest with themselves and who had looked into their own needs before God.

Many people believed in Corinth from a wide variety of backgrounds. From lives of deep-seated depravity and immorality came to know Jesus Christ and their lives were changed.

I would love to think that we still believed that in Edinburgh. That we still believed we had that relevant Gospel. That we had a single-minded faith to share Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

That we're not embarrassed by that. We're not too cool to share that message. We haven't moved on to another message. Is there something else that we can preach?

Is there something else that we can share that is the power of God? Are we embarrassed by the message of Jesus Christ? I hope not. Because there is no other way. And lives will only be changed as we share Jesus Christ.

[7 : 13] And as we share the message of Jesus Christ with our friends. It will be rejected by some. We'll get a hard time from others. Even some in the church will be annoyed at us for doing this.

Strangely. But if the Gospel has ceased to be relevant, I will stop speaking now. And I will never ever utter a word from this pulpit again.

If there's something else, I will stop. There can't be another message. And that was the single-minded commitment and faith that Paul had.

And that we must share in our lives as we live for Jesus Christ. We also recognise from the Corinthians and from the passage we read in Acts.

That Paul was not only Paul but the people who were with him were sacrificial. And were wholly committed to the work of the Gospel.

[8 : 18] They took Paul into their homes. Paul worked there. Paul stayed for a year and a half and talked with them. They spent a great deal of energy and time in planting the church in Corinth.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 11, he talks about that. That he says that he robbed other churches by receiving support from them. So as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I wasn't a burden on anyone.

He made sure that he wasn't a burden, that he worked hard, that he was committed. He had Priscilla and Aquila working with him. They opened their homes. Justice Tishes opened his home and they spent time there teaching people.

There was a huge commitment to them. Huge commitment to the work. A great deal of energy was engaged and involved in what they were doing.

You know Paul argues in other places that he worked harder than even those who were super apostles. Those who were regarded as absolutely significant and important and kind of the first order.

[9 : 23] But Paul, even though he knew the gospel was Christ's gospel and that it was God who opened hearts. And it was Christ who redeemed people.

It didn't mean he wasn't a hard worker and he wasn't sacrificial and committed to serving the living God.

And we look for that same commitment and that same effort in our own lives for Jesus Christ. That we're looking to be committed to gospel ministry.

Not being bit players for the kingdom here. Not just turning up on a Sunday or whenever else it is. Not sitting back waiting for heaven to come.

Not spending a little time here and saying I'll give it a year. I'll move on to another church where maybe I'll not be asked to be so committed and so hardworking.

[10 : 28] There's this great commitment to the gospel to one another. To having our homes open for Jesus Christ.

To putting Him before our jobs, before our comforts, before our traditions. If that's what it takes.

Being flexible. Being around one another for Christ's sake. Praying for the city. Longing for the city.

And being committed to that city. And I think Paul was motivated to work hard because of the promise of God.

In this chapter you'll know this promise that we have in this chapter. Because I always mention it in this church and you probably fed up of hearing me talk about this promise.

[11 : 32] Promise that was laid on my heart when we moved here 11 years ago. And God pulled me from a comfortable and enjoyable and blessed situation in the Highlands.

And He says do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. For I'm with you. No one is going to harm and attack you because I have many people in this city.

Paul was able to work hard because he was spurred on by God's promise. God's promise of people that would be redeemed. People that would come to faith.

And he spent a year and a half there. The longest time he spent in any place at that level. And he taught them while he was there.

And he spoke to them and he brought them to faith and they followed the Gospel and understood the Word of God.

[12 : 33] He reached out in that time. He reached out when he was working. He reached out when he wasn't working. He went out when people rejected. He went somewhere else because he knew God had his people in the city.

I hope you don't want me to be a Jeremiah and preach judgment for 40 years.

Because I believe God is the God of the Great Commission. God has many people in this city. And we have to reach out with the conviction of that promise for our own lives and for our own city.

I've been here about 11 years now. Much longer than Paul was in Corinth. I don't know the size of the church in Corinth when Paul left after a year and a half. But it was a substantial church and it grew to become a very important church.

It had lots of difficulties and lots of problems in that church. Many people came to faith in that city and formed the church that was in Corinth.

[13 : 51] I feel 11 years on. Not many converts. Jesus Christ in the city. I hope that rather than being discouraged by that, knowing that God's timing is God's timing, that we can continue to be convicted by the promise of God.

And that we can continue to be motivated by the promise of God. And that we remain here, that we are taught, that we are taught the word of God, that we follow through in our understanding of the truth.

And that we live our lives eager to learn, eager to serve, eager to reach out. Both as a congregation and individually.

And the last thing that I want to say about Paul, he had a single-minded faith and a committed life.

And he was motivated to work hard. And he also, I believe, particularly as we look throughout the whole of the book, Letter to Corinthians, he had a trembling love. That section we read in 1 Corinthians 2 verse 4, where he says, I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling.

[15 : 21] And where he goes on to say in the second letter, in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, very telling word where he says to them, we have spoken freely to you Corinthians and opened wider hearts to you.

We are not withholding our affection from you, but you're withholding yours from us as a fate exchange. I speak to you as my children. Open wide your hearts also. So we have that great trembling love.

He came in fear and trembling with the gospel, but he came with great committed love for them that he never lost in his life. So there's a trembling love. He was touched himself by God's grace.

The greatest of all sinners, the murderer of the Christian church, transformed by God's grace, always touched by God's grace. He took that love they had and with a trembling lip, he shared the gospel in Corinth.

Must have been hugely difficult many times. And he didn't do it from the pulpit. Or well, he did, I'm sure it's something. But he went out with the message. People talk about the primacy of preaching.

[16 : 35] Preaching is hugely important. But we need the people to hear that preaching. Very few of them are coming through our doors. People don't just come because the door is open.

We need to be reaching out with the trembling love of the gospel and sharing that love with those who don't know Jesus Christ.

I wonder in our own context what makes a... I speak guardedly here about a blessed church. Or can I say an inverted comma a successful church?

What makes a church? Or a growing church? We've used different terminology. Well, we know there's basics, don't we? And we've been looking at these basics in the morning. You know, a foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ, a commitment to prayer, a commitment to the truth of God's word.

But I think in our own experience as a church, there's two other things that are very important. And they almost always go along with a church that is growing and being blessed.

[17 : 42] That is hard work and trembling love. I love for people. I think both these things are hugely significant in the growth of a church.

Hard work. You know, we believe in a sovereign God that does not allow us to sit on our back sides in the kingdom. A sovereign God is what gives us the drive to reach out.

And the drive to work hard. No one worked harder than Paul for the gospel. So hard work and love for people. A trembling love to share the gospel with people.

We can be very orthodox in our faith and very clear in our understanding. But if we have no love for people, our orthodoxy will often fall in deaf ears.

Christ had such a great love for people, and he was willing to take great risks for people. And as we love people, and as we work hard with all the other givens that we accept, but being prayerful and being obedient and having Christ as our foundation and knowing grace and peace and all these things that we've talked about before, then I believe God will bless us. God will bless you in your life as you work hard for the gospel and as you love people. And loving people will take us to the strangest places for this kingdom.

[19 : 19] So we continue to seek to be a New Testament church. To mirror and to mimic the church of the New Testament and its characteristics and its personality.

And it's important for us to sometimes just take a step back, both as congregation and as individuals, and ask ourselves, who are we? And what are we engaged in? What is our work? What are we doing?

It's easy for us to become head shaking, looking at the world outside and saying how evil they are, how far from Christ they'll never come to faith. There's no point in reaching out.

Well, we know that wasn't Paul's attitude in Corinth. We can become hair splitting over small and minor things that are great fun to argue about, but have no place around the basic truths of the gospel.

We can be navel gazing, wishing the church did things differently and always internally looking at ourselves without looking out to the lost.

[20 : 43] Or we can be daydreaming, envious of the world outside, longing for different days, longing for days when we weren't being asked to take this responsibility under Christ.

I hope that we are able to move forward into the virgin territory of Edinburgh with the gospel. Not just ourselves, there's lots of churches in Edinburgh that have a burden and a concern for the gospel here.

And I hope we can do that with passion and with work and with trembling love and with that absolutely single-minded commitment to Jesus Christ and to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I'm very grateful for the support and opportunity I have here with you in partnership to continue to reach Edinburgh with the gospel.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Heavenly Father, we ask and pray that you would teach us your way, that you lead us in your truth, that you would guide us.

[21 : 48] We pray for our city this evening and we pray that we would not become monastic, that we would not separate ourselves from the people of the city who need to hear about Jesus Christ.

We remind ourselves of Paul, particularly as we thought about the variety of ways last week that he reached out into the city of Athens, going to the Areopagus, going to the marketplace, going to the synagogues, going to the churches, reaching out a sent person, reflecting a sent message in a sent church.

And may we be a people who recognise the shoulders that we rub each day, that we are in contact with the people that we know, the colleagues that we have, the friends that we've made, the neighbours that we live beside.

Lord God, we ask that you would give us a holy interest in our lives and that we would live such good lives among them that they bring glory to God on the day of His visiting.

And we pray and ask Lord God that we would see many people coming to faith here in the city. We pray for the gospel partnership that seeks to reach out and to train church planters and apprentices and to focus on the gospel work in this city.

[23 : 26] We thank you for friendships in the gospel and we thank you for what the gospel, what binds us together in Christ. And we ask and pray that that would be ongoing and significant for us.

Remember our sister churches, the free church here in Edinburgh, in Beclaw and Greyfriars, and also in Leith, we remember the Leith congregation in these difficult days for them, where today they said farewell to their minister, she takes on another congregation in Inverness, and we pray for them as they consider their future and who will pastor them and what they will do.

May they not become frozen into inactivity without a pastor, but may they see their own gifts and talents, the energies they have, the tremendous relationships they have built up in the community of Leith, and may they continue to build these relationships and share Jesus Christ with all that they come into contact with.

So bless them and bless us, and bless our ongoing evening this night. For Jesus' sake, amen.