

Close of Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Acts 18:1-22

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller's sermon explores Paul's experiences in Corinth, emphasizing the importance of encouragement, perseverance in ministry, and the power of the gospel.

Scripture: Acts 18:1

Topics: "Divine Providence", "Perseverance in Ministry"

Description

J.R. Miller reflects on the significance of Paul's arrival in Corinth, emphasizing how his presence and the gospel he brought transformed the city. Through divine providence, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, who became his friends and supporters, illustrating how hardships can lead to unexpected blessings. Miller highlights the importance of work and trade, as Paul supported himself while preaching, and encourages the need for mutual encouragement among believers. Despite facing discouragement and opposition, Paul remained faithful to his mission, reassured by God's promise of future believers in the city. The sermon concludes with a reminder that perseverance in sharing the gospel can lead to eventual fruitfulness, even when immediate results are not visible.

Transcript

Nobody noticed a plain man walking along the streets of Corinth, one day, travel-stained and weary. Yet his coming into Corinth meant more for that city than the entrance of any other man in the city's whole history. He brought the gospel there, and the gospel is the power of God wherever it goes.

There was a Divine Hand guiding his steps that day. As he went about seeking employment, he came upon two people who from that time proved good friends to him and helpers also in his work. He "found . . . Aquila . . . with his wife Priscilla." It was a happy providence that brought these people together. It gave Paul a lodging place and a home in the great city. It furnished him also an opportunity to work and support himself while he was engaged as a missionary. Then, no doubt, his influence upon them was also very great.

The other day one friend wrote to another, "You have the power of bringing to the surface the very best that is in my nature, and of making me try to live up to my highest possibilities." Like power Paul seems to have had, over Aquila and Priscilla. There was in them much that was good, and it needed only Paul's coming to them--to bring out the good, to wake up the possibilities of beauty and strength that were in

them.

The emperor had expelled the Jews from Rome. No doubt Aquila and Priscilla thought it a great hardship to be driven from their home in Rome. But in the end blessing came to them and also through them to the Church of Christ from this hardship. Being in Corinth, they had the opportunity of knowing Paul and of having him as a resident of their own home for many months. Thus rich blessing came to them from him, and they in turn became a blessing to him and to the Church. By and by they went back to Rome, carrying with them all they had received from their contact with the apostle. Even the hard things of our lives, over which we grieve at the time, if we commit them all to God--will prove in the end full of blessing to us and to others.

It was a good custom of the Jews to require all their boys to learn a trade. They were thus fitted for any emergency which might make it necessary for them to earn their own bread. If Paul had had no trade, he would not have been able to support himself in Corinth while doing missionary work. But by means of his trade, he was able to care for himself by working during the week, while he preached the gospel on the Sabbaths.

There are thousands of young men in our country who fail in life, because in youth they have not been trained to any useful employment. Thrown upon their own resources later, by some accident or misfortune, they are helpless. Work is honorable and dignified. Paul was a tentmaker; Jesus was a carpenter. No matter how rich a young man may be--he should never be content to live in idleness.

Paul was not satisfied, however, merely to be a tentmaker in Corinth. He had come there with the gospel, and he must preach. He did not abandon the ministry to go into business, as some men find it easy to do. He wrought at his trade during the week--that he might give his Sabbaths to preaching. A great many Christian people do this all the time. There are business men who spend six days in intense occupation--and then give the Sabbath to Christian work in Sunday schools or missionary efforts.

It would seem that Paul got discouraged in some way. At least we are told that when his friends Silas and Timothy came, his strength was renewed. Paul was a man who needed human love. The coming of Silas and Timothy made him all the more earnest as a preacher. This suggests one way in which we can help in the work of Christ. If we cannot ourselves be great workers--we can give cheer and encouragement to those who are carrying the burdens, pouring fresh hope and earnestness into their hearts. We should never be discouragers of others--we should always seek to be encouragers. We do not know what help a little kindness, or a word of cheer may give to one who is working under great pressure.

Not all of Paul's work was successful. Not all who heard him yielded to Christ. There were some who opposed and blasphemed. But having preached the gospel faithfully, Paul was able to lay upon the people themselves the burden of their rejection of Christ. "He shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility!" He loved them still, with a deep and yearning love. But he had done his work faithfully, with a loving heart, and now he was free from responsibility. He could do nothing more for them. If they persisted in perishing, their blood would be upon their own heads. They could not say to him in the judgment that he had not been faithful to them.

We must be very faithful, dealing with our friends and neighbors so that when we meet them at last on the judgment day--they may not say to us that we did not warn them of their danger, nor tell them of the Savior. We must so bear ourselves now in our relations to them, that if any of our friends perish--we cannot blame ourselves.

Christ is always an encourager of his people. Even the best Christian workers will sometimes feel disheartened when after faithful and diligent effort, people still resist Christ. But even then, they are not to conclude that their work is in vain. The harvest which does not ripen today--may ripen tomorrow. Paul was distressed by the small results of his preaching--but the Lord said to him, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent." Probably there was personal danger also, for he seems to have been afraid. The words read as if he were even thinking of giving up, for he was bidden to continue to speak and not to be silent.

If such a man as Paul got discouraged, it is not strange that other workers for Christ have similar experiences at times and even feel like giving up their work. But the Lord's encouraging words to Paul are for all times and for all workers. No matter how much we may feel disheartened for the seeming failure of our work, by opposition, even by persecution, we must not yield to depression. God is with us, and his work never can fail.

In the midst of Paul's discouragements, when it seemed that he was making no impression, the Lord brought him a most cheering message, saying to him, "I have many people in this city." This was cheering news, indeed. It was as when Jesus told the weary, discouraged disciples, after their fruitless, all night toiling, to cast their nets again and they would make a catch. Paul was thinking there was no use in preaching anymore in Corinth, that there could be no results. Then the Lord told him that he had many people in that city--and that they would believe--if the apostle continued to preach the gospel faithfully.

They were sinners yet, buried away in the world--but when the gospel was preached they would accept it and be saved. This was a wonderfully inspiring assurance. We should never allow ourselves to give up too soon in a place where no results come at once. We should labor on, believing that there are yet blessings to be obtained by our continued faithfulness. If Paul had ceased preaching in the midst of his discouragement, and had gone away from Corinth, these people of Christ's in that city would not have learned of the Savior.

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