



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 18:1–23

“The Gospel at Vanity Fair”

TRANSCRIPT

We are turning today to Acts chapter 18, and we are reading verse 1 through verse 23. In the past few weeks, probably three or four weeks ago, I was reading a book by John Leith, on the Reformed tradition, and in it Professor Leith made a statement that I think is true to the doctrines of which he was speaking; and, I think, in this case, it's true also of the teaching of the Word of God. He said, “The central theme of Calvinist theology, which holds it all together, is the conviction that every human being has every moment to do with the living God.” That's a very important statement. I think it's a biblical statement that every human being has every moment to do with the living God. And it surely is illustrated in the book of Acts in which again as we have so often seen, Luke is trying to make plain to us the fact that what we read about in the book of Acts is the continuation of the things that our Lord began to do and teach, recorded in the earthly ministry in the Gospel of Luke. But, what we see in Acts is that our Lord is still living, still working, and the things that are accomplished are, really, in the ultimate His work, and He is with His ministers of the Word of God, wherever they are proclaiming at all times.

Now, in chapter 18, in verse 1, we read these words. Paul is on his second missionary journey. He has come over to Greece; he has been in Philippi, he has been in Thessalonica, he's been in Berea, he's been in Athens; and now, Luke writes:

“After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. (This word, incidentally, is probably a word that is used in a broader sense here, of leatherworkers. So, we’ll understand it in that way, although the point of the inference is not great.) And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded (or, thought to persuade) the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, (the Authorized Version following a particular reading of the Greek text, translates “pressed in the spirit,” but if you have a more modern version, the chances are that you read something like he was “pressed” or “constrained” by the word, for in probably the better manuscripts, the reading is “word” rather than “spirit.” So, we’ll take it in that sense, realizing, of course, that to be wholly constrained by the “word” and to be the Apostle and as effective as he was, surely indicates that his preaching was, also, in the spirit.) and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshiped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.”

So, he didn’t go far. He actually went next door. And the individual, incidentally, who is called here Titus Justus in the Greek text, probably had as his—as we would say—as his first name, Gaius. Now, we know that in the Epistle to the Romans, in the last chapter, the 16th chapter of the epistle, the Apostle makes reference to a Gaius, in Corinth.

He says, “Gaius, mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you.” It’s likely, so Sir William Ramsey reasoned, “That this Justus here is the Gaius mentioned there.”

So, Paul, went next door into this man’s house, right by the synagogue and we read in verse 8:

“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee. (Notice the word “hurt” because we will read in a moment that men did set upon the Apostle. But they did not hurt him) For I have much people in this city.

“And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them. And when Gallio was the deputy (or proconsul) of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of Words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat.

“Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes. (You may remember, from your reading of the New Testament, that the Apostle writing to the Corinthians says, and he’s writing from Rome, “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God...” I say, writing from Rome, he may have been writing from Ephesus. “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth.” It certainly seems likely that the Sosthenes to whom Paul refers in 1 Corinthians is this Sostehenes here. But, of course, there is no certainty on that point.) Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things. And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a

vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

“But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.”

There is a man who has in all of the moments of his life to do with the living God. He recognizes it and observing the proper priorities, puts Him first. May God help us to do the same. May He bless this, the reading of His Word.

Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we come to Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we give Thee thanks and praise Thy name for the goodness shown to us through Him. As we look back, Lord, over the days of our lives, and reflect upon them, the way in which Thou hast guided us and preserved us and kept us to this very day, we give Thee thanks, we give praise to Thy name. We rejoice for the day in which, through the Holy Spirit, Thou didst bring us to the knowledge of Him, whom to know is life eternal. And we thank Thee for the constant concern that Thou hast shown over us. And, truly, Lord, we have had to do with Thee every moment of our lives.

We ask Thy blessing upon us—each one of us—we pray that the problems and the trials and the difficulties of our lives may be looked at it in the light of the eternal goodness, which Thou hast shown toward the saints of God in electing them, in saving them, and in constantly preserving them. Thou hast surely been good to us.

And, Lord, if there should be some in this auditorium, who have not yet come to the knowledge of Him, whom to know is life eternal, and into whose hands is to come into the hands of

eternal mercy, O God, through the Holy Spirit, work mightily for the salvation of their souls, too. For those of us who are believers, strengthen us; give us clarity of spiritual vision. Enable us, Lord, truly, to live our lives before Thee. We thank Thee for the church of Jesus Christ—all of the church—all of those who believe in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—although they not be called by our name, we pray Thy blessing upon them. We pray, Lord, for other—others—of the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose faith is in Thee. Strengthen them today wherever they may be and bless the preachers of the Word.

We pray for our country and we ask, especially, Lord, for our elders and our deacons and the workers in our office, and others who carry on the ministry of Believers Chapel. And we thank Thee, Lord, that by Thy grace, it has stretched out to the four corners of this earth. We are grateful to Thee. We thank Thee for it. We know it is all of Thy working. And for those, Lord, whose names are listed in our Calendar of Concern, we pray for them. And for some, Lord, who are in the hospital, we especially pray for them. Strengthen them, giving healing, bless their family and friends and encourage them. And we give Thee thanks now, for this privilege of meeting together in a meeting such as this. Strengthen us all, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today, as we continue our exposition of the book of the Acts is “Gathering Sheep at Vanity Fair.” The Apostle is on his second missionary journey and he has just been in Athens. And now he comes to Corinth. To travel from Athens to Corinth is very much a like a trip from Oxford to London; or, perhaps—that is if you were a Bostonian—from Boston to New York. For, when one traveled from Athens, the intellectual capital of Greece, to Corinth; one was traveling to the commercial capital of the land of Greece, and, one of the truly important commercial cities of the time.

One well-known commentator has said, “If Athens was a center of clouded light, Corinth was a center of corrupt life. If Athens was full of idolatry, Corinth was full of sensuality.”

One of the most famous of the British poets and critics was Algernon Charles Swineburne, who lived around the turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries. In one of his poems, he cries out protestingly that, “After Christ, the world has never known the same light-heartedness again.” That the Lord Jesus has taken away all the natural gaiety and good spirits of the world, that until he came the Greco-Roman world was perfectly happy and innocent and contented in its nature and its worship of nature, its worship of Zeus and Dionysus and Aphrodite, and that Jesus, when he came really spoiled everything. In fact, he wrote a little couplet that went like this.

“Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath,” but all of this is false to the facts. To think of the ancient world before the time of the coming of Christ as happy and gay and lighthearted and morally at peace is nothing more than a myth. And it’s remarkable that Mr. Swineburne should actually think that people would actually believe such a thing as that.

If one wants the picture of the ancient world that is true to the facts, one should come to a man like Paul the Apostle. Now, when Paul was in Corinth, there he gave us a picture of what life in the ancient world was really like. In fact, when you read the Apostle Paul and you read particularly the Epistle to the Romans, which he wrote from Corinth, you will get a picture of Corinth and the world that is really true to the facts of life.

“The world was growing old,” says Mommsen, and not even Caesar could make it young again. Everywhere the best spirits were in despair.” And so, to think that things were happy and lighthearted and gay is truly contrary to the facts.

Corinth was the Vanity Fair of the ancient world. One could call it the Paris of the ancient world, or the London of the ancient world. Commercially, it was the hub of commerce. In fact, it was called the Bridge of Greece, situated on the isthmus between the Peloponnese in the south and Attica in the north, a little isthmus of five miles wide. Men built the city of Corinth there because of its important location. A port on the east, a port on the west; and, when commercial ships came, they could sail into the gulfs and would only be five miles from the west, and they could avoid the trip

around the cape Maleas to the south of the Peloponnese. That was a very dangerous place. It was like the Cape of Good Hope. In fact, it was said that, “Let him who thinks about sailing around Maleas make his will beforehand.”

So, because it was so dangerous, when men wanted to go to the west, they came to Corinth, and traveled through those gulfs, where it was calm and nice. So, Corinth became a great commercial center. It was also the home of the Isthmian Games, and so, second only to the Olympic Games. The city, naturally, attracted a great crowd.

What was particularly significant for us is the fact that Corinth was morally a debauched and depraved city. In fact, the term *corinthiazesthai* is built on the name Corinth, as you probably can tell from just listening to that Greek word. *corinthiazesthai* meant “to behave like a Corinthian.” And so, that meant to act in lust. On the Greek stages, when Corinthians were portrayed they were always portrayed as being drunk, very much as we like to portray the Irish in our plays; or, perhaps the Scots. Although, not too long ago—just a few weeks ago, actually—I read in the paper that some who have done some scientific research have discovered that Americans drink more per capita than the Irish. And, in fact, the Irish stand down the list and not at the top at all. Which is not so surprising, except that that’s the way we think falsely of the Irish.

Well, the Corinthians, evidently, lived up to their name; and so, they were presented as staggering drunks whenever they appeared on the stages of the ancient world’s theaters. Spiritually, Corinth was the place where Aphrodite was worshiped. A good many years before the time that the Apostle Paul came there, there was a temple dedicated to Aphrodite, with one thousand prostitutes attached to that temple. And, consequently, in the afternoon and evening, when the prostitutes came down into the city, the city was a place of a great deal of abandonment to sexual lusts. In fact, there was an ancient proverb to the effect, “Not every man can afford a journey to Corinth,” and what is striking about this is that though that temple had been destroyed, Corinth still was that kind of a wicked city when the Apostle was there.

And, in fact, when he describes the Corinthians, in the 6th chapter in the 11th verse, he says this of them. “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate...” You notice in this catalog of sins, there are very few sinners that he leaves out. And he’s describing their societies. He says, “Nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor coveters, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

And then, there comes the triumphant phrase, after this, “And such were some of you.” So, the Corinthians, who came from this society, were describable by these terms, but they had met through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, our Lord Himself. The very iniquity of the land of Corinth was an opportunity for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Well, when Paul, the little Jewish leatherworker, came into the city of Corinth, from Athens—if you had said to one of the Greek men of Corinth, “One of the greatest men of all time has just come into your city, and when people have forgotten what kind of a city Corinth was, they’ll still be talking about this man and they’ll be reading the things that he has written.” I’m sure that those important men of Corinth, with their richness and all of the other things that characterized them, would have lifted up their lips in contempt at the very idea that that little Jewish man would create such a change in the history of the world.

But, actually, what Paul preached in the city of Corinth, was dynamite in the ancient world and has been dynamite down through the years. And, today, we are still paying attention to the things that this mighty man, by the grace of God, wrote. Surely it is true, one of the greatest men that has ever graced the face of this earth was that little Jewish leatherworker, who entered the city, on the morning of the beginning of the ministry in Corinth.

Now, the Apostle was alone. He was a man, just like the rest of us. He had the concerns and tensions that we have. He was very much disturbed over the fact that he had been run out of cities to the north. Silas and Timothy and Luke, his friends, were those in the north; and they were there in the midst of things that were perilous for them. He was concerned over them. Now, it doesn’t say

that in Acts chapter 18. You have to read all of the New Testament to see this; but, if you will read his letters that he wrote to the Thessalonians, you will see that the Apostle was very concerned about Silas and Timothy. And so, he was very anxious over their safety as he came into the city of Corinth that morning.

We read that he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all Jews to leave Rome. And Aquila and Priscilla were Jewish and so they had been forced to leave Rome. And Paul, somehow, found his way to them and came to them as Luke says.

Perhaps they were Christians already; perhaps Paul knew of them. Or, possibly, the Apostle was thrown in their company and it was through him that they came to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts omits the story of the conversion of Aquila and Priscilla, so we really don't know how they were converted. But, at any rate, they were and Paul came into their presence.

Now, it's an unusual couple, in this sense: That Priscilla is more often mentioned first, in the pairing of their names. It's more often Priscilla and Aquila, than Aquila and Priscilla. And that's a little unusual because in the ancient world it would be normal to mention the man first and then the lady, or the wife. But, in this case, Priscilla is more often mentioned first than Aquila. Why? Well, we don't know. It's possible that she was from a higher social strata than Aquila. Such as, if you might refer to me and Martha, you might say, Martha and Lewis—rather than Lewis and Martha. But then, also, it might be that the education of Priscilla was greater than the education of Aquila. And so, perhaps, she was mentioned for that reason. Most Bible students, however, believe that Priscilla is more mentioned more frequently before Aquila, because of the fact that she evidently was a very well instructed woman in the doctrines of the Word of God. And, later on, in this very chapter, we shall see some evidence of it.

When a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, came to Ephesus, he was instructed in the Word of God but he didn't understand precisely the New Testament truth of things. And so, when Aquila and Priscilla had heard him, they took him unto them and expounded unto him the

Word of God more perfectly. And, evidently, she took the lead in that. And so, we gather from this that she was a woman that had an unusually sound knowledge of the Word of God. And we should be thankful for all of them who have a sound knowledge of the Word of God.

They were tentmakers—or leather makers—and the Apostle came in among them. And we get, I think, a marvelous insight here into how the Apostle conducted his ministry. In fact, the Christian church might be better off if the ministry were conducted in this way today.

We have a great deal of criticism of the church of Christ today, over its financial policies. And, a great deal of the criticism is justified; very justifiable. There are men in the ministry who are in the ministry for money. Let me say it again. There are men in the ministry who are in the ministry for money. In fact, it's a marvelous way to make money because they play upon the gullible consciences of the saints, who often are too willing to support that which is really somewhat shady, spiritually. But then, we feel sorry, because we are believers in Christ. And we have a natural sense of compassion, given to all of the saints by the Lord God. And so, when an appeal comes; too often we yield to those appeals, when we know that it's not the most harmonious ministry so far as the Word of God is concerned. But we feel sorry and so many of us—many of us preachers know how you feel—and so, we pray upon you, as preachers.

That's not surprising. That's human nature. And we are better off if we recognize that. And the Apostle prevented that kind of criticism because he worked with his own hands. He went in among the Thessalonians and he said, “I will not be a burden to you.” And so, he worked.

He came here to Corinth and he worked. He was a leather worker. He had a trade. Jewish Rabbis had trades. Rabbi Judah once wrote, “He that teacheth not his son a trade doth the same as if he had taught him to be a thief.” Rabbis did not take money for their teaching. The apostle grew up in that kind of environment. And so, what was normal for him was to support himself by his work. So, no one could say, “That man is in the ministry for money.” He worked with his hands. And so, he came and he worked with his hands.

Scribes and Rabbis didn't take money for their teaching; and so, their teaching was earnest and sincere teaching. Now, the Apostle having come in, having begun to work with his hand, did what he usually did. He didn't give up the ministry. He didn't say like so many men, “I have to go to work in the morning at 7 o'clock, I don't get home until 7 or 8 o'clock at night. I'm just too tired to study the Word of God. And I'll leave that to the fellow that I pay to study the Word of God for me.” No, no. That was not the way they thought. And it would be marvelous and wonderful if we had some men who felt that way today.

Men taught their children the Word of God. The men set their little children on their knees and instructed them in the Word of God. Not mamma, but poppa. And they were responsible for teaching them the Word of God.

As Mr. Prier so often says, “The finest Bible teacher you'll ever have is your own father.” How true that is!

So, the Apostle was trained in that kind of tradition; he worked with his hands. And, he went into the synagogue and he preached.

Now, he preached as we've been seeing, in the common way of the times, of going back to the Old Testament, tracing the flow of Old Testament salvation, what scholars call *Heilsgeschichte*—the history of salvation, centered around the great promises of the coming redeemer, first given in fullness to Abraham, confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, expanded in the promises made to David and then in the promises through Jeremiah. Putting his finger on various texts and pointing out how those prophecies were fulfilled in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, he concluded with the statement that Jesus was the Messiah, set out by the Old Testament prophets.

Now, if you were reading in the Greek text, at this point, in verse 4, “He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath,” you'd notice a little mark in your Greek text, which refers you to the apparatus at the bottom of the page, in which information concerning other manuscripts than the one that the critics have selected as the best text. And, looking down at the bottom, you would notice—and I'm going to read it all for you, you don't have to look at it yourself because you don't

have it before you—but you’d look at the bottom and you would see there is a little phrase in Greek that in some of the ancient manuscripts, which you would recognize as the Western New Testament textual tradition, in that those particular manuscripts—not too many of them but in a few of them—there is an insertion. That is, something was written in them that is not, probably, in the better manuscripts. But, it’s interesting because it is in some of the ancient copies.

The phrase or clause would be this. I’ll just translate the sentence, as it would appear. “And he reasoned in the synagogue, Sabbath by Sabbath, and inserting the name of the Lord Jesus, he sought to persuade also both Jews and Greeks.” The clause inserted is “inserting the name of the Lord Jesus.” What is meant by that? Well, what is evidently meant by it is that as the Apostle preached the Old Testament, as he spoke about the Messianic prophecies from the beginning, at the particular places at which he referred to texts, he would say, inserting the name of the Lord Jesus, this passage has to do with the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, speaking about Abraham, offering up Isaac, he would say, “This illustrates the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father’s gift of the Son.”

When he came to the Levitical prophecies of the Levitical cultus, he would say, “These are illustrative offerings of what the Lord Jesus would do, when He came.”

And, when he went on to the messianic prophecies concerning the prophet, he would say, “The Lord Jesus is this great prophet.” And, on, in through the New Testament, and at the highlight of the New Testament—of the Old Testament prophecies; he would refer to the Lord Jesus Christ. So, he would insert the Lord Jesus in these Old Testament prophecies and accounts, showing that Christ had fulfilled them.

Now, you know, he learned something, no doubt, from what he had been taught as a rabbi. And the rabbis did that very thing. For example, in Isaiah chapter 42, in the great prophecy of the suffering servant of Jehovah, in the Aramaic paraphrase of that particular passage, which was read in Paul’s day and in our Lord’s day, in the meetings of the synagogue, the word Messiah is inserted. It’s

not in the Hebrew text, but it was inserted by the writers of the Targum—the paraphrase—because they regarded that as a reference to the Messiah to come.

In Isaiah chapter 52, verse 13 through chapter 53, verse 12, at the beginning of the great prophecy, they all inserted the word *machiac*, or Messiah there. So, they were inserting the name of the Messiah and Paul says, “I’m inserting the name of the Lord Jesus, because He is the Messiah.” And so, he expounded the Word of God in that way.

And I would love to have been there to hear some of those expositions. I think I understand a good bit of what Paul would say, but I still would have liked to hear him do it. In fact, I think one of these days I’m going to hear it. They have instant replay in heaven, and so, we will be able to see and hear, no doubt, what the Apostle does with the Old Testament texts and we will see where we were right; and, we’ll probably see where we were wrong, as well.

Now, things got a little hot for the Apostle, as was usually the case. But, before they got real hot, Silas and Timothy came. And they came from Macedonia, we read, and when they came, the text says, that Paul became, “Wholly absorbed in preaching.”

Now, that’s interesting, isn’t it? He had been working as a leather maker, but now he became wholly absorbed in preaching. Why? Well, I just make this suggestion. It’s only a suggestion. But, you know, he wrote the Philippians later on and he said, “No church communicated with me,” in giving, he’s talking about, “such as you have. And what you gave me was an offering of a sweet smelling savor.”

So, evidently, when Silas and Timothy came, they said, “By the way, Paul, the believers in Philippi have a little gift for you. They appreciate so much what you’ve done, and they thought that you might like to have a little extra money,” and so they pulled out a little pouch, a little purse, and it was jingling with some gold and silver coins. And they dropped it down in front of Paul and he said—they said, “This is a gift from the church at Corinth.”

Now, notice, they didn't say, “By the way, they've answered your prayer letter and when you sent out your prayer letter and said how much you needed to end the year in the black, they decided they'd try to help you.”

No. It was all voluntary, guided by the Holy Spirit. And so, Paul took the money, he opened it up, he saw, “My, this is so much. I have wanted to devote myself full-time to the ministry of the Word here in Corinth, and by the grace of God and the gifts of the Philippians, I'm going to stop my leather making for awhile and give myself, wholly to the ministry of the Word.”

And so, as a result of the gift, that's evidently what was meant when it says that he was, wholly, “became wholly absorbed in the Word, and sought to testify to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.”

Now, when that happened, things really began to get hot, because they had to deal with Paul all the time. He has now, for a limited period of time become a full-time worker, to use the kind of language that people use today. So, the Jews opposed themselves, and blasphemed, and finally, seeing that things were not getting any better in the synagogue, he said, he shook his raiment, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I'm going to the Gentiles.” And I imagine some of them said, “Good! I hope he goes down to Sparta or some place like that,” and so he went next door.

So, he goes next door, and there—of all the places—a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshiped God, house joined hard to the synagogue.

“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.” And there the Corinthian church was set up and carried on its ministry, right next door to the synagogue, so that they were constantly in contact with the Jewish people there. Crispus.

Now, it says that he was the “chief ruler” of the synagogue; that doesn't mean he was a preacher. The elders in the synagogue had charge of the ministry. They were responsible for the synagogue services and they were responsible for the reading of the Old Testaments, and the

passages from the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets; and, then, they were responsible for the conduct of the synagogue itself. And they were the ones who permitted those who had spiritual gifts of ministry to teach the word at times, as our Lord taught and as the Apostle taught, when he was in Antioch in Pisidia. So, they were very important individuals, who had control of matter in the synagogue.

And Crispus is the chief ruler of the synagogue, and Crispus becomes a believer in the Lord. As we might say, an official board member becomes converted. Amazing! Astonishing! That's news to think that an official board member can be converted. God has given me the privilege of baptizing elders in the past. That is, men who were already elders, who have been converted; just like John Wesley, who was a preacher, and then acknowledged that he did not really know the Lord. And so, here is Crispus and he's converted.

And I can imagine, things really are getting hot now. And it's no wonder that we read in 1 Corinthians that Paul says, “I was in your midst in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.” And so, while he determined not to know anything among them save Jesus Christ, and this one crucified, it was not easy for the Apostle. He knew that his life was on the line constantly; that anything could happen and he would lose his life. And so, as things got hotter and hotter, one night, he had a visitor. And the visitor was the Lord Himself, and the Lord said to Paul, “Paul, don't be afraid.” Even apostles can be fearful—fearful of what might happen to them—I'm sure that the apostle didn't mind dying, but he didn't like the process of dying. Who likes the process of dying? Who likes the pain? But he didn't mind dying. He said he had a desire to depart and be with Christ. But I'm sure that the Apostle would have not looked forward to the actual process of dying. Who does?

So, the Lord appeared to him and said, “Don't be afraid, Paul. Go on speaking and don't fall silent, because I am with you. And no man shall set on thee to harm thee, for I have much people in this city.”

It’s easy to say, “Fear not,” but you need a good reason. And Paul had a good reason. “Fear not, for I am with you.”

And so, the Lord, who appeared to Thomas and swept the midnight from his soul over the question of faith and a resurrected Savior, appeared to the Apostle Paul and swept the despair and the darkness from the heart of the Apostle with the assurance of His continual presence.

You might have thought, well, Paul didn’t need any appearance from the Lord. Did he not know the words, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”? Yes, I’m sure he did. But we all need the constant encouragement of the Word of God and the Lord Jesus gave him the constant encouragement of the Word and then, from time to time, appeared to him to help him in his times of trial; as He does for all of the saints of God in their times of trial, too.

Now, he says something that’s rather important, I think, as he closes that statement to Paul. He says, “For I have much people in this city.” Everything that is transpiring is incidental to this. Paul finding some of His sheep in Vanity Fair. No! Let’s turn it around—Christ finding His sheep in Vanity Fair through the Apostle Paul. That’s what’s happening. Jesus, remember, said, “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring.”

And so, this God who cannot be frustrated in his purposes, will accomplish all of His purposes; and every one of His little sheep shall be brought into the presence of the Lord Jesus one day.

Peter says, “We were as sheep going astray; but we’ve returned unto the shepherd and bishop of our souls.” That’s what God is doing today! And, today, in Believers Chapel and wherever the Word of God is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is still doing His work of gathering the sheep of the Lord Jesus and bringing them to the knowledge of Him. And that is the one thing that encourages a minister of the Word of God.

You know, there are people who say, “If you believe in divine election—divine unconditional election—how can you preach?” Why, my dear friend, if I didn’t believe in divine unconditional election, I couldn’t preach. Because, knowing the heart of man, knowing how hard-

hearted we are, naturally, and knowing that we will not of ourselves respond; that would be the most despairing occupation that you could ever have; to preach to people who are so hard-hearted that they will not come. How would you like to preach to that kind of flock? That’s the kind, incidentally, that Ezekiel was given the commission to preach to. He said—God said to him—“Go preach to people who are stiff-necked and hard of heart.”

In spite of what some of our friendly enemies say, that’s not a reference to Believers Chapel. That would be difficult. Why, as a matter of fact, the thing that encourages a preacher is the assurance that there will be some response; that God the Holy Spirit will work when His Word is proclaimed and will save His sheep.

And so, I preach with the confident assurance that God is accomplishing His task; He doesn’t tell me who will respond and who will not respond. But I preach the Word universally, and I know when a person comes to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, it’s one of our Lord’s sheep coming home.

So, “I have much people in this city, Paul. You go ahead preaching the Word and I’ll see to it that they come to the knowledge of Me, whom to know is life eternal.”

So, Paul continued there for six months, preaching the Word of God. He was confident that the Lord Jesus does not send His servants to preach to the wind.

Now, there’s an interesting little incident here involving Gallio. We don’t have time to look at it in detail. Gallio was the half-brother of the philosopher Seneca. Seneca said of his brother, “No one of mortals is so pleasant to one person as he is to all.” And, one of the ancient poets, Statius by name, called him, “Duncis Gallio” or, “Sweet Gallio.”

So, he was a man with a very nice disposition and when there came an attack on the Apostle Paul, but no harm, Gallio was called and the Apostle appears before him. And the Jewish people make charge against him that, “He persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.”

Well, Gallio was an individual who was not going to be involved in a question like this and so he said, “If it be a question of words and names, and of your law, you see to that; I’m not going to

be a judge in these matters.” And he drove them from the judgment seat, or from the court as we would say.

Evidently, some of the Greeks thought that they could vent their anti-Semitism a bit, and so they took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And then, Luke, giving us his opinion of Gallio says, “Gallio cared for none of these things.”

Scholars say that the evangelist and historian, Luke, is wrong in—and others as well—in saying that Gallio did not care for any of these things. They say that what he means is simply that the passage speaks of his impartiality. But there is a difference between judging and caring. What this is, is probably the judgment of Luke on the character of Gallio. “He was an individual who did not really find it a matter of concern to be interested in the things of the spirit.

Well, the remainder of our section is the story of Paul’s journey home, by way of Ephesus. And then, as his return, as he came back to strengthen the saints and we will read in our next studies of his ministry in the city of Ephesus.

But let me conclude with just a few comments. It’s not an unexpected thing then, for a saint to be downcast and despairing. Paul knew his ups and downs, just as you and I know our ups and downs. It is the prerogative of God, someone has said, “to be immutable.” Only God is immutable. We are changeable. We do have our ups and downs; and even apostles have their ups and downs.

Candle lights flicker, the Son alone burns steadily. And Elijah today will beard Ahab and Jezebel and all their priests, and tomorrow he will hide his head in his hands and say, “Take me away, I’m not better than my fathers.”

We have our ups and downs; Paul had his ups and downs, but we know that God is the one who really will ultimately care for us in our trials.

And, other thing, notice the inevitable desire of a Christian to proclaim the Word, even in weakness, and fear; the Apostle reasoned in strength, he testified, conviction demands expression. Every true Christian will give testimony, if in the company of unbelievers there never escapes a word

from our mouth, concerning our faith in Christ, we have reason to doubt that we really have a faith in Christ.

How is it possible for a person to understand that he has been saved by the noble and sweet name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has offered Himself as sacrifice for us, and whom we say we love, and never say a word about Him? Can you think of a man in love with a woman, who never said anything about her? Can it be possible that an individual knows that the ultimate of his life is his relationship to the Lord, but his mouth is forever shut in the presence of unbelievers?

Many years ago, I heard Aunt Kate, so well known over the city of Dallas, tell of a story she used to go out to the fair at Texas, and there seek to witness to children. And she said, “One year, a little boy came up with another little boy in tow, and said to Aunt Kate, ‘Last year you saved me, and now this year, I brought him.’”

Well, that’s the heart of a Christian.

Now, may I close by saying, the ignorant levity and indifference with which some men pass crises of their lives like Gallio, is certainly a tragedy. Here is Gallio, proconsul, hovering near are angels, and Gallio—a good and amiable man—cares for none of these things.

One of the great tragedies of life is that in the presence of that which is fundamentally the concern of life, men can be totally indifferent. It’s possible for you to attend a meeting like this, dragged here by some friend perhaps, and in the midst of the unspeakable riches of the Lord Jesus Christ, and granted a very poor ministration of the saving gospel of Christ, for you to think nothing more than, “How nice it would be to be out of this meeting?”

But, let me assure you, nothing is more important for human existence than the relationship that you bear to Him, who loved sinners and gave Himself for them. If you are here this morning, and you have never believed in Christ, we invite you to put your trust in Him, stop trusting in your church, in your good works, in your baptism, in your sitting at the Lord’s Table, in your education, in your culture, on in whatever you maybe trusting; by God’s grace recognize there is only one way to

salvation, through the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross, when the Son of God died for sinners, bearing the sins of sinners.

Come to Christ! Believe in Him! Cast yourself upon Him! Receive as a free gift eternal life! For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

Come to Christ! Don’t leave this auditorium without the assurance of the forgiveness of sins through Him. Come into the flock, enjoy the ministry of the Good Shepherd, in all of the days of your earthly pilgrimage and on unto the ages of the ages.

As an ambassador of Him, I on behalf of the elders and the saints of Believers Chapel, invite you to trust in Christ, right where you are. You don’t have to come forward, sign a decision card, raise your hand in the meeting—salvation is accomplished through the Holy Spirit, as you respond to Him. May God give you grace to respond. And then, also, come to the elders and say, “I’ve received Christ. I’d like to be baptized in water.”

May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the message of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. How unworthy we are to proclaim it, how feebly we proclaim the unsearchable riches of the Son of God. But we trust, Lord, in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who draws men to Christ, at the Father’s behest. And, Father, if there should be some in this audience today, who have never come to Christ, draw them to Him that they may be saved. And for those who are saved, O God, open our lips to proclaim His goodness and mercy.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.