

## Sermon: Never Alone

**Text: Acts 18:1-17**

### Introduction:

We don't often think of the Apostle Paul having to deal with deep discouragement. But there is no question that loneliness and disappointment were his constant companions. And it makes perfect sense! I mentioned a few weeks ago that when Paul was expelled from the city of Berea, it was THE SIXTH TIME that he had been (literally!) kicked out of a city. Not once. Not twice. Six times.

When Paul left Berea, he did so alone. As we've seen in previous weeks—Dr. Luke had stayed behind in Philippi to help the young church there get their feet on the ground (Acts 16:40 & 17:1). Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea for the very same reason (Acts 17:14-15). Paul was hustled away to the coast, and then boarded a boat completely by himself to sail for the capital city of Athens.

Athens proved to be a very difficult place for Paul to minister. As we saw last week, Paul took the message of the Gospel—first into the marketplace; and then in a much more formal setting at a council of leading “philosophers and thinker” in a place called “The Areopagus” (also known as Mars Hill). Paul did a masterful job of explaining to the council the core truths of the Gospel. But the reception was far from overwhelming. We see at the end of Acts 17 that a handful of people put their trust in Christ—and that's it. As far as we know, there weren't enough believers to really start a church. Paul didn't seem to build any significant relationships. In the much larger scope of what God was doing through Paul on this world-changing trip, Paul's time in Athens was a REALLY BIG DEAL. But I have to believe that as Paul was living it in real time...it might have felt like a failure. And in all of it—Paul was by himself.

I am of the opinion that by the time Paul got to the city of Corinth—we was dealing with disappointment. He wasn't ready to throw in the towel by any means. But he needed a friend. And he needed to hear a fresh word from God. AND IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE PAUL RECEIVED BOTH—as we'll see in our study today.

We gain a great deal of insight into how Paul was feeling when we read **1 Corinthians 2:1-5**:

*“And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and 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 not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.”*

- What does Paul say here about his eloquence and communication skills?
- What was the focus of Paul's message?
- Does it surprise you to hear that Paul came to Corinth in “weakness with great fear and trembling”? Is this how you think of Paul. Does this encourage you—knowing that Paul struggled with these kinds of emotions and fears?
- Who did Paul want to get the credit for any good that came out of his time in Corinth?

### Examination:

- Read **Acts 18:1-17**

- What are some reasons that Corinth would have been a good place for Paul to spend considerable time? (Acts 18:1&11)
- Who did Paul meet in Corinth (18:1-3)?
  - What did they have in common?
  - Why were they in Corinth rather than in their native home of Italy (18:2)?
- How did God take Priscilla and Aquilla's bad situation (having to leave Italy) and create good from it?
- When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, to what did Paul devote himself (18:5)?
  - Does this surprise you? What do you make of this?
- What happened when the Jews opposed Paul (18:6)? How did Paul respond?
- Why is it significant that Paul "shook out his clothes" when leaving the synagogue?
- Since most of the Jews did not accept Paul's teaching, what do you think life was like for Crispus, who believed? (Remember: Crispus formerly was the synagogue leader.)
- Why do you think the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision (18:9-10)?
  - How do you think you would have felt after having such a vision?
  - How might this have helped Paul in dealing with whatever disappointment or discouragement that he might have felt?
  - What do you think it meant when God said, "I have many people in this city"? (v. 10)
  - Why do you think Paul might have been afraid now, even after years of serving Jesus?
  - Is fear a normal experience for servants of God? If so, why do so many people let fear stop them from doing what God is asking of them?
- The Jews brought Paul before the judgment seat of Gallio, the governor of Achaia. What did the Jews claim and what was Gallio's response (18:12-16)? [The fact that Dr. Luke included the historical detail that Gallio was the proconsul (governor) of Achaia turns out to be a SIGNIFICANT detail in the life and ministry of Paul. About a hundred years ago, archaeologists unearthed fragments of a letter, written by Roman Emperor Claudius to Governor Gallio—indicating that Gallio was the governor for just a short period of time (end of 51AD – early 52AD). This tells us exactly when Paul was in Corinth, and helps date the rest of his life and ministry.]
- What happened to Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue (18:17)?

### **Application:**

Disappointment and discouragement are very real—and can effect ALL OF US (including the Apostle Paul!). Understanding this can be half the battle. Seek out another person to talk to about these things (the same way that God provided Aquila and Priscilla). It is NEVER good to walk through discouragement alone. Also—ask the Lord to speak to your heart. Ask Him to give you hope. And listen for his voice. God knows our needs, and will help us.