

Acts 18:1

1 After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth.

A man was shoveling snow from his driveway when a couple of young boys carrying snow shovels approached him. “Shovel your snow, Mister?” one of them asked. “Only 10 bucks.”

Puzzled, the man replied, “Can’t you see that I’m doing it myself?”

“Sure,” said the lad; “that’s why we asked. We get most of our business from people who are half way through and feel like quitting.”

I suppose all of us at some time or another have wanted to give up and quit. In the heat of a moment we’ll say, “I’m going to leave this job or this church or this family, and they’ll miss me...they’ll wish they had treated me differently!”

I read a book recently that was titled, “I quit! I just didn’t tell you.”

Often I have some of these feelings:

- There’s no use. The harder I try, the worse things get.
- No one seems to listen when I witness. I feel like I’m just spinning my wheels.
- Or, I feel like I’m going through the motions at church but really feel that I’m not getting anything out of it.
- The daily stresses and problems of my job get me down and I even wonder if I will ever find happiness.

Do any of you sometimes feel this way or is just me?

Well, we’re not alone. Here are a few examples of great men of God who have wanted to quit.

Moses was a great leader that we read about in the Old Testament who was handpicked by God! He had God’s power on his life, but in Numbers 11:15 he said to God, “So if You are going to deal thus with

me, please kill me at once.”

Joshua was a great general who was also handpicked by God to lead Israel into the Promised Land. But in Joshua 7:7, he said, “would to God we had been content and dwelt on the other side of Jordan” Joshua felt like quitting! He eventually got over it, thankfully!

Elijah was a great prophet of God. He was willing to challenge the idolatry of his day. He called fire down from heaven in a face off with the prophets of Baal, but in I Kings 19:4 after it was all over, he requested for himself that he might die, and said, “It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life!”

When we talk about Job we talk about his patience and faith, and he was truly a great man. He had a great beginning and a great ending, but in-between, when he lost everything, he wished he had not been born. He became suicidal and was extremely depressed for a period of time!

In Job 3:3 he said, “Let the day perish in which I was born!”

Jonah wanted God to kill him, and was spiritually depressed and not even happy for the all the souls that had been saved in Nineveh!

I could go on and on. I think that sometimes God’s people need a spiritual 2nd wind.

So why does God give us so many examples of faithful people who wanted to quit or became depressed? Why isn’t the Scripture only full of victory and rejoicing?

When we get to the 18th chapter of Acts, we find the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey. When he departed Athens to travel to Corinth, he had been at it for more than 2 years. As we talked about last week, his experience in Athens was less than satisfactory. Although he spent his time reasoning with the intellectuals of his time in Athens, not much fruit was seen. It would have been normal for Paul to want to quit and go home.

In 1 Cor 2:1-3 Paul recalls his feeling at the time Acts 18 was occurring:

1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling...

So as we look at Acts 18 this morning, we need to understand the context of where Paul was in his spiritual journey.

You know, sometimes we get the impression that the great saints of God were superheroes. But they were just like you and me. They were human with all the weaknesses and failures of any human beings.

Remember that at this point on his trip he was alone. Paul had been beaten and jailed at Philippi, persecuted at Thessalonica and Berea, ridiculed in Athens, and now he has to face the people in Corinth! He was at a low point, a crossroads in his ministry, and he was just about to quit!

Can you blame him?

Corinth was a wicked city. It was an isthmus. The Corinthians built skids over it so that trade could flow freely across its borders. It was a wealthy city.

It is said that Corinth had the Temple of Aphrodite, who was the goddess of sex, where 1,000 prostitutes sold their bodies in the temple in the name of religion. The Romans claimed that Corinth was so debauched, that just visiting the city was defiling.

The city was made up of people who embraced drugs, alcohol, sex and money. Sounds a lot like Hollywood doesn't it?

As Christians we know that these material things will never satisfy the soul. And it is interesting that where the emptiness of life is greatest, some of the greatest ministry opportunities occur.

Some of the finest churches in world are in LA. And Paul was about to find a fertile field when he arrived in Corinth.

Notice verse 1.

1 After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, 3 and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. 4 And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Paul must have needed money and by trade he was a tent maker. So it appears that he set up business and God gave him two friends, Aquila and Priscilla. These two people would become very important throughout the rest of Paul's ministry and we are going to talk more about them next week. But listen to Rom 16:3-5:

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila , my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; 5 also greet the church that is in their house.

Just when Paul was about to quit, God gave him two people to come beside him and continue the ministry. Let me say that friendships are important. I know we live an area where it is HARD to have time to cultivate friendships. But God understands our needs. Jesus had Peter, James and John. David had Jonathan. Paul had Aquila and Priscilla. Who do you have?

Why is it important to have friendships outside of your family?

Paul might have quit if it weren't for Aquila and Priscilla. But after he met these two, he was able to press on. And sometimes when it rains it pours! Look at verse 5.

5 But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the Word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

No longer alone, Paul was able to do what God had called him to do. And as the ministry got tougher, God gave Paul even more encouragement. Look at verse 6.

6 But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." 7 Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. 8 Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

So as the body of Christ begins to take hold in Corinth, God now speaks directly to Paul and tells him not to quit. Look at verse 9.

9 And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." 11 And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Verse 11 says he didn't quit, he continued! Why? Because God told him in verses 9 and 10: "it was too soon to quit!"

I know many of you are struggling with many different kinds of situations. Some of you may be about to give up. But God may not be finished with you yet.

God has given us several promises in Scripture. Perhaps you need to claim some of these.

The first promise we have from God is that He is always present. Notice in verse 10 he tells Paul, "I am with you."

In times of loneliness, you may want to claim Heb. 13:5.

5 Jesus said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee!

The Greek word for “never” literally means, never, no never, no never!

All of your acquaintances may stab you in the back, but Jesus is a friend that sticks closer than a brother!

So when defeat or discouragement or sickness or financial problems or heartaches or family problems come we need to remember that the God of the mountain is still the God in the valley! God knows everything about us and He has promised never to leave us.

The Psalmist wrote in Ps. 23: “Yea, tho’ I walk thru the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...for thou art with me!”

Even in death, God promises never to leave us. There is a story of a preacher who asked his church, “How many want to go to heaven?” All raised their hands except 1 old man. “You sir, don’t you wanna go someday?” The old man said, “Sure, if you put it that way...I thought you were getting up a load to go right now!”

We have the promise of His presence! But we also have the promise of God’s protection.

Notice in verse 10 it says “no man will attack you in order to harm you.”

Notice it doesn’t say that he wouldn’t be hurt, but that he wouldn’t be harmed! What is the difference?

They might have killed the apostle Paul, but not until he was able to say, “I have finished my course.”

They killed the Lord Jesus, but not before He said, “It is finished!”

God has a purpose for your life. And if you choose to, you can live it out, fearlessly...though there will be persecution, trials and hardships...but until your work on earth is done, God’s not finished with you. Therefore, Satan can’t harm you, man can’t hurt you, and

disease cannot touch you unless God allows it. There are no accidents with God...He and He alone will call you home when the time is right!

It is good to know, that nothing can happen to us without the Lord's permission.

So we have the promise of God's presence! We have the promise of God's protection. Finally we have the promise of God's potential.

The end of verse 10 says, "...for I have many people in this city."

How could God say that? There were no than a handful of Christians in Corinth!

It was the promise of God's potential. God didn't see the perverts of this city for what they were, but for what they were going to be!

Years later Paul wrote to Corinthian believers. Listen to 1 Cor 6:9:

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

We need to see people not for who that are, but for who they could be in Christ. That is encouraging.

Sometimes we get the impression that Paul was invincible; a type of superman with a perfect attitude. But he was just like us. He felt pain and discouragement and fear and defeat. But he didn't quit!

Satan will not give up. Verse 12 through 18 tells us that but he knew that God was in control.

And so the 2nd missionary journey comes to a close with a stop in Ephesus. We'll talk more about Ephesus next week. Look at verse 18.

18 Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. 19 They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, 21 but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus.

22 When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch.

Paul completed what he started out to do. The lesson for us this morning is threefold.

God has promised us His presence.
God has promised us His protection.
And God alone knows the potential.

We are called to be witness and God will take care of the rest.