Acts 2024 Juan Seo (Sep 8, 2024)

**DO NOT BE AFRAID; KEEP ON SPEAKING**

Acts 18:1-28

Key Verse 18:9-10

**9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”**

Today's message is about the Apostle Paul's ministry in Corinth. After preaching the gospel in Athens, Paul arrived in Corinth (1). The distance from Athens to Corinth is about 50 miles, which took a couple of days on foot. What kind of city was Corinth? Corinth is located on the southwest end of the isthmus, which connects the Peloponnese Peninsula to mainland Greece. It separates the Aegean Sea to the east from the Ionian Sea to the west. In modern times the Corinth Canal was built in 1893. As a commercial center, Corinth was the largest and most prosperous city of mainland Greece. In Corinth, there were many shrines to Greek gods. Particularly, a temple for Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, was located at the top of the Acropolis. This temple had numerous priestesses who practiced prostitution. As a result, during that time, throughout the Mediterranean world, the expression ‘to Corinthianize’ became widely known to mean ‘to live immorally.’ Paul arrived in this city and began his gospel ministry.

I want to highlight three key aspects of Paul's ministry in Corinth: number one, the tentmaker mission; number two, the house church ministry; and number three, the ministry empowered by the Lord.

***First, the tentmaker mission:***

Paul left his co-workers, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, in Thessalonica and came to Corinth alone. He must have felt quite lonely. However, in Corinth, Paul met new co-workers, a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla. Look at verses 2-3: ***“There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.***” Aquila and Priscilla had been living in Rome, but the Roman Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome around A.D. 49. As a result, they left Rome and came to Corinth. Aquila and Priscilla were already Christians before meeting Paul (1 Cor 16:15). When Paul had heard about them, he went to see them. Amazingly, they had the same occupation as tentmakers. The "tent" here refers to small tents used by travelers. At that time, many rabbis supported themselves by engaging in manual labor. The Apostle Paul, too, learned tent-making from a young age to support himself. Paul stayed and worked with them. This is how Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, and they became valuable co-workers in Christ. What an amazing grace of God! During the week, Paul made and sold tents to support himself. And every Sabbath, he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

You may have heard the term ***‘Tentmaker Mission.’*** In UBF, we use the term ***‘Self-supporting Mission,’*** the same as the tentmaker mission. The term ‘tentmaker mission’ comes from the Apostle Paul, who supported himself by making tents while carrying out his missionary work. It refers to bi-vocational ministry, combining both mission work and financial self-support. Most UBF missionaries are tentmakers or self-supporting missionaries. In their mission fields, they serve God’s mission while supporting themselves in various ways. In our New York UBF, many missionaries work as nurses and teachers. These self-supporting missionaries carry a double burden, working in their jobs while also doing missionary work. Thus, the path of a self-supporting missionary is not an easy one.

It seems that the Apostle Paul did not always work as a tentmaker missionary. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. 2 Corinthians 11:9 says, ***"When I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed."*** Silas and Timothy brought an offering from Macedonia for Paul's mission work. As a result, Paul could devote himself exclusively to preaching, meaning he was not working as a tentmaker then. It seems that Paul's primary focus was not on self-support but rather on the ministry of preaching the gospel.

Two key concepts of the tentmaker mission theology are ***‘Business As Mission’*** and ***‘Business For Mission.’*** ***‘Business As Mission’*** means the business itself is the mission; through that business, the gospel of Jesus Christ is shared. It includes running the business with Christian values and providing jobs for needy people. On the other hand, ***‘Business For Mission’*** uses business to support mission work. In this model, the business is run to provide financial self-support for the mission, but it can be stopped or changed at any time if necessary. ***‘Business For Mission’*** is the more traditional model of self-supporting missions, and most UBF missionaries follow this approach. Both ***‘Business As Mission’*** and ***‘Business For Mission’*** are good models with their own advantages. What is most important is discovering our calling before God and doing our best to fulfill it.

I also served as a self-supporting missionary in Venezuela. I lived a hectic life, carrying the double burden of campus ministry and self-supporting through my business. God blessed our campus ministry by raising many disciples of Jesus among Venezuelan college students. However, my business repeatedly failed for about seven years, which led me to a deep discouragement as a self-supporting missionary. Sometimes, I even complained to God, asking, "Why did you call me a self-supporting missionary?" But God, in His mercy, allowed me to succeed in business in an unexpected way. As a result, I could support both the church and my family financially. After coming to the United States in 2013, I stopped my business and became a full-time seminary student. From 2020, I worked as a full-time pastor at Chicago UBF. Now, I am serving as a full-time pastor at New York UBF, receiving financial support from the church and dedicating myself to ministry.

I have experienced self-supporting and full-time ministry, so I can understand the struggles faced by both missionaries and pastors. Someone once asked me which is better, self-supporting ministry or full-time ministry. I believe both types of ministry are very precious before God. We should be thankful for the calling we received from God and serve our missions with all our hearts. The most significant advantage of self-supporting ministry is the opportunity to meet people who do not yet know Jesus. This allows us to share the gospel with many people. I believe it is crucial to become salt and light in our workplace. I pray that we continue to fulfill self-supporting missions by helping those who need the gospel at our workplace with God's word as well as practical help, guiding them to Jesus.

***Second, the house church ministry:***

Priscilla and Aquila became excellent co-workers for God’s ministry in Corinth. They opened their home so that Paul could live with them and carry out God’s mission effectively. They also supported him financially. When Paul left Corinth and sailed for Syria, Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him. Upon arriving in Ephesus, they stayed there to serve God’s mission. They helped Apollos to become a powerful servant of God. Apollos was a Jew but a native of Alexandria. Alexandria was the second most important city in the Roman Empire and was renowned as a center of wisdom. One of the most famous and significant libraries of the ancient world was in Alexandria. Also, the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture, was produced in Alexandria. Having been educated there, Apollos was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and spoke with great fervor, teaching about Jesus accurately. However, there was one major issue: he knew only the baptism of John. What does this mean? Apollos had a deep understanding of the Scriptures, recognized that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Bible, and had received John’s baptism of repentance. But he had not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He knew Jesus intellectually but not experientially. While he was a highly intellectual and skilled preacher, his preaching lacked the work of the Holy Spirit.

When Priscilla and Aquila listened to his sermon, they realized that his preaching lacked the most essential element: the presence of the Holy Spirit. They knew that without receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Apollos would not be able to become a fruitful servant of God. So, Priscilla and Aquila invited Apollos to their home. They prepared delicious Greek food for him, and in a warm atmosphere, they explained to him the way of God more adequately. Afterward, Apollos became a highly spiritual and powerful servant of God. He vigorously preached the gospel wherever he went, saying that Jesus was the Messiah. He became an influential servant of God to the early churches, including Corinth. In this way, Priscilla and Aquila were remarkable self-supporting missionaries who raised this great servant of God.

When we read Romans 16:3-5, we learn that Priscilla and Aquila had already returned to Rome. ***“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house.”*** Paul remembers that Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for God’s mission. He also refers to their home as “the church that meets at their house.” Even after returning to Rome, Priscilla and Aquila continued faithfully serving God’s mission, using their house as a church. We call it the House Church ministry. Through their house church, many could meet Jesus as their Savior and become Jesus’ disciples. Priscilla and Aquila are excellent examples of a Christian family that serves God’s mission fruitfully.

The house church refers to a family who loves God and serves God's mission for His glory. In our church community, we have prayed earnestly for the establishment of house churches, and God has blessed us by raising many. Our church has grown through these house churches, as many families have opened their homes, invited people in, and served them. I am deeply thankful to God for our house churches. I am especially grateful for young families like Joseph Han Jr. and Rebecca Han Lee, as well as Sam Choi and Sarah Choi Bae, who have been faithfully serving many young adults. I pray that many more house churches will be established among us. May the families of New York UBF grow stronger spiritually, love God, serve those in need, and bear abundant fruit for the glory of God.

***Third, the ministry empowered by the Lord:***

Let’s read verses 9-10 together: ***“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.’”*** It seems that Paul could not sleep that night because he was overwhelmed with fear. Why? The passage doesn’t explicitly explain the reason. However, we can imagine his situation based on what happened during his missionary journey. While many heard the gospel and accepted Jesus through Paul’s preaching, he faced severe persecution and trials. In Philippi, he was severely flogged and thrown into prison. In Thessalonica, he faced intense opposition from adversaries, who even followed him to Berea to disrupt his ministry. In Athens, a few people responded to his gospel message despite his efforts to preach the gospel with all his strength. In Corinth, things weren’t easy either. Many Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, which led Paul to react in frustration. He shook out his clothes in protest and declared, ***“Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles”*** (6). Though many people in Corinth accepted the gospel, Paul was still deeply troubled by the opposition and fearful that his ministry might fail. He was physically and spiritually exhausted, as he later reflected in 1 Corinthians 2:3, ***“I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.”***

At this time, the risen Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision and encouraged him, saying: ***"Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent."*** Jesus also gave him a promise: ***"For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."*** Then, Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. As promised, Jesus protected Paul from persecution, and a remarkable work of the Holy Spirit occurred, as many in Corinth heard the gospel and accepted Jesus.

We are currently praying for our campus ministry. Last Friday, we had the second workshop on campus ministry. Some of us have already been going to college to share the gospel with students. We pray for colleges in New York like SUNY, CUNY, St. John's University, Queens College, Queensborough Community College, LaGuardia Community College, Long Island University, New York University, Columbia University, and others. We plan to hold the Young Adults Praise and Worship Night every month. As we take on the challenges of college ministry, our hearts may feel discouraged. We may have doubts because of past failures or fear of being rejected by college students. However, at times like this, we need to hear the voice of Jesus: ***“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”*** We must believe that Jesus has many people at the colleges in New York. We must keep on speaking the gospel of Jesus Christ. May God help us to preach the gospel boldly and experience the powerful work of the Holy Spirit among us.