

Acts 18:1-23

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Date: 30 April 2017

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[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word and turn to Acts chapter 18.! Acts chapter 18. Acts chapter 18 in our text for this morning will be verses 1-23.

! This is Luke's second narrative account of Jesus' life. His first is the Gospel according to Luke, which is about Jesus' earthly ministry.

His second is the book we're studying this morning and have been for quite some time, often called the Acts of the Apostles, which I like to call the Acts of the Risen and Ascended Jesus.

It was written that we might witness the working of Jesus by the agency of the Holy Spirit in the lives of His church.

In today's text, we will note the conclusion of the Apostle Paul's second missionary journey. But first we're going to see his arrival and ministry in the city of Corinth.

[1 : 07] He has traveled now down through Macedonia. He's in Europe now. From Philippi to Thessalonica and then to Berea.

He has been beaten and imprisoned. He has escaped a mob riot and he has been chased out of the region. He has gone further south to Athens where he sees gospel fruit, but it seems not much. And in verse 1 of chapter 18, Luke records for us, after this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. Corinth was on the land bridge that connects the Peloponnesian Peninsula with mainland Greece. I'd encourage you to look at that. You may even have a map in the back of your copy of God's Word that would show you this little island, this little bridge, this little land bridge between the two. Not an island, a land bridge. It was, therefore, in a very strategic location as the city of Corinth had two ports, one on the east coast, the other on the west.

[2 : 20] In order to save a 200-mile journey around the peninsula, many ships were taken out at one port, and I found this so fascinating as an aside, and rolled on logs for four miles through the city to be put in the other port.

This was easier. This was more efficient than sailing all the way around the peninsula. Also of interesting note, in AD 67, so beyond the time of our text today, Nero began a canal that was not completed until 1893.

Now if you look at a modern map, you'll see a canal that cuts across that land bridge. The town of Corinth was a transient town. Lots of sailors, lots of tradesmen, very little stability in the town, and as such it was full of vice.

What comes to my mind when I think of Corinth is what happens in Corinth stays in Corinth. People coming and going all the time and living licentiously as a result.

1,500 feet above the city of Corinth was the Acropolis, where the temple of Aphrodite was. Each evening the temple's 1,000 priestesses, who were ritual prostitutes, would descend the mountain into the city for the quote-unquote worship of Aphrodite.

[3 : 54] Corinth surpassed other Greek cities in wickedness, and that's saying a lot. It actually became the phrase, to Corinthianize, was common in this day, which meant to practice whoredom, to Corinthianize.

It was a dark and depressing city. And we find Paul there discouraged. As he reflects upon his time in Corinth, when writing to the church there in 1 Corinthians 2.3, he says, and I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and much trembling.

I was not encouraged, I was discouraged when I came to you. Do you ever feel discouraged in your faith?

Has your labor in the gospel ever been or felt fruitless? I know that our common discouragement shared amongst our church comes because we see so many people come, but then also so many people go.

Those of us who stay here can often feel discouraged as we send people out. But beloved, this should not be so.

[5 : 23] We are positioned in a place, in a unique way, to minister far and wide the Word of the Lord. We have seen this across the past eight years.

We gather and go each week here in this area. And we gather in Dahlonga. And we go to the ends of the earth.

Is that an encouraging reality? Or a discouraging one? Saying goodbye to people that we love will always be bittersweet.

It should never not be. Have some element of bitter to it. It's hard to say goodbye to people that we know and love and share our lives with.

But I contend with you today that it ultimately ought to be sweet. It ought to be an encouragement to our souls to see people sent forth.

[6 : 28] And this is going to get tested. It's been tested in the past. We've sent a lot of people out from this place. I noted to you last week that if you take our start date, we just honestly, we kind of picked a random date.

When do we actually exist as we exist? We said January 1 of 2009. And you come to the present day, there are only six people who are original members of our church that have had an uninterrupted time here.

Only six. Across eight years. And that's not been because of turmoil. And I know a lot of you are fresh and new to the life of our church. We've had a very good and growing congregation.

We haven't had massive upheavals and upsets. And all of a sudden, we're one number and then we're half that number because people got upset and got in clubs and took off. We've never had any kind of controversy like that. But people have come and they have been trained up, we hope, by grace.

And then they've gone. Gone off to other places. We've seen people go all over the world. We've seen people spread across the southeast. Last year, we had the great blessing of starting another church in Oakwood, Georgia.

[7 : 43] And I don't know about you guys, but when we get together all together at things like the picnic yesterday, I feel that loss a little more. Like I recognize how much I miss some of those people when I see them again.

Like, ah, it was so good when I got to see you every week and now it seems to be only a couple times a year. We recently sent out Ash and Janine Harris.

Ash took a job in Boone, North Carolina. I mentioned earlier, Oziama, Obele, going to Brazil soon. Kirby and Leanna White are going to soon be leaving in just a couple of weeks, going to Washington State where Kirby is from.

Michael and Lauren Shealy are moving. He's being commissioned and stationed. They're moving to Columbus, Georgia. Daniel and Carly Walker are going back to Madison County at least for a season.

We don't know how long at this point, but they will be gone for a bit of time. And Phillip and Natalie Akins are going to Canton for jobs there. And I may have missed somebody.

[8 : 50] I really tried not to, but I may have missed someone who will be leaving us probably for good. There are countless others.

College students, many of you are going to be gone after this Sunday. And the summer will be a little bit more quiet without you here and you will be missed.

I'm becoming further and further convinced that faithful gospel ministry leaves much room for discouragement.

But, I want to be encouraged in the midst of faithful gospel ministry. So join me in our text for today to that end.

That is where we're aiming to be encouraged in the midst of faithful gospel ministry. Beloved, this is God's word to us.

[9 : 51] It was written for His glory and for our good. And we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Begin reading in verse 1. After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.

And he went to see them. And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tent makers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, your blood be on your own heads.

I am innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justice, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.

[11:06] Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.

And he stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God among them. But when Galio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.

But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Galio said to the Jews, If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint.

But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things. And he drove them from the tribunal.

And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Galio paid no attention to any of this. After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria and with him Priscilla and Aquila.

[12:32] At Kincray, he had cut his hair for he was under a vow. And they came to Ephesus and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But on taking leave of them, he said, I will return to you if God wills. And he set sail from Ephesus.

When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch. After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Now, that is a lot of text, right? And the information comes at us almost in a rapid-fire sense. And so, I understand if you're already going why verses 1-23.

So it's my hope to wrap it together for you thematically by helping us consider five ways that God encourages the souls of His discouraged servants.

[13:36] Five ways that God encourages the souls of His discouraged servants. And I'm going to give those five to you and then we'll take them one at a time. So number one, God encourages the souls of His discouraged servants number one with new partners.

Number two with provision. Number three with His presence. Number four with protection.

I guess they all start with P's. Number five, with purpose. In so many ways I'm not a good Baptist, but in that way I am.

I like to alliterate. So firstly, God encourages the souls of His discouraged servants with new partners.

We see Him in this new city by Himself. He does not have Silas and Timothy. His missionary band has been split up for various circumstances.

[14:41] And we find Him by Himself, but He seeks out, it would seem, He finds a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, and his wife Priscilla.

And He joins Himself to them. They are also tent makers by trade and He stays with them and He works with them. And the Bible does not tell us of the conversion of Aquila and Priscilla, but they were likely already Christians at this point, having come from the church that already existed in Rome.

We can fail as we study Acts to remember that the Gospel was not just going forth into the world on a single front. It wasn't just Paul and his missionary band that was preaching the good news of Jesus Christ.

But followers of Jesus Christ were doing what followers of Jesus Christ do. They were taking the message of God's saving work to all people.

Luke's narrative is primarily about the Apostle Paul's ministry as it should be and as it serves us well, but the Gospel is going forth. And so it's likely that this couple have already become part of the church in Rome before ever meeting Paul.

[15:59] Likely. We don't know for sure, but likely. And God in His gracious providence brings new partners in the Gospel to Corinth ahead of Paul.

Catch that. Before Paul ever gets there, Aquila and Priscilla are there. Brought there, partners of the same trade, they give him a place to stay, they give him a livelihood upon his arrival. And the way in which they arrive there, Luke records for us because of the command of Claudius that all the Jews had to leave Rome.

That decree is mentioned here in this text and one other place in all recorded history by a Roman historian named Suetonius, I think, who wrote 70 years after the fact the following.

As the Jews were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Crestus, Claudius banished them from Rome.

[17:09] It's just one sentence, this one mention of this thing that happened by this Roman historian Suetonius. Now, the word he uses here, Crestus, a name, a formal name, Crestus, is just one letter variation from the Latin for Christ Christus.

So many presume that what was happening in Rome was because of the preaching of the gospel, Jews were doing what so many Jews seem to do in this day. They were getting furious about the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ and were rioting as a result.

And what Suetonius has understood some years later, hearing the telling, he keeps hearing this name, that there was a man there that was causing all of this.

Now, that is still possible. There was actually a guy named Crestus causing the Jews to riot in Rome. But I think more likely, he just made a mistake in the hearing of the word and recorded it as Crestus.

So, probably, the Jews are in an uproar all the time because of the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ. And Claudius sends them away from Rome. And that's how Aquila and Priscilla find themselves in Corinth to become new partners in gospel ministry with Paul.

[18:32] And they also become partners with them in their living situation and in their livelihood. The text says that they are tent makers. If you're familiar with the life of Paul, you've probably heard him spoken of as a tent maker, we can tend to use that term of bivocational ministers, that they're tent makers, they do some other work to earn their livelihood than just preaching the gospel.

But interestingly, the Greek word used for tent makers could also refer to leather workers. It could also be leather workers. And I always had this picture in my mind of Paul with canvas, sewing canvas tents, but tents in this day were made from animal skin.

They were made from leather. So likely they made tents, but they also may have made many other things. Maybe in Corinth all the rage was to have an original Priscilla purse.

A Paul belt, something like that. But this is the work that they're doing when they're there. You'll also note that Priscilla and Aquila go with him.

So verse 18, after a year and a half and in this trial, Paul stays many days longer. Luke records, we don't know exactly how long, but many days longer than he takes leave of the brothers and sets sails for Syria and with him go Priscilla and Aquila.

[19:59] And then in verse 19, when they come to Ephesus, he leaves them there and along with Apollos, they become the beginning of the church there at Ephesus.

So they become partners with him, new partners with him in gospel ministry. Beloved, this is God's church. It belongs to him.

Christ's family church at Dahlenega is his. And if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are God's children. And he will not leave us alone.

Partners in ministry will go. They will. I think if we're doing faithful ministry, if we're looking out to the world, partners in ministry will go.

But they will also come. They will also come. We have new opportunity for new relationship and new investment. And those who come are of great benefit to us in that way.

[21:02] Paul writes to the Philippian church in chapter 1 verses 3 through 5 of Philippians. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you. Always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.

Why? Because of your partnership in the gospel. From the first day when he came to them, when they became believers, until now.

And so here's Paul from a distance writing a letter to the Philippian church, thanking God, praising him for the partnership they still had.

So God encourages the souls of his discouraged servants with new partners. Secondly, he does so with provision, and just as a side alliterated point, with provision from old partners.

believers. We see in the first part of verse 5 that Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia. You may recall that when Paul was in Athens, he was waiting for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him as he had left them in Berea with orders to come to him as soon as possible.

[22 : 20] That's what he was there doing, and then as Paul does, as he's waiting, he went about preaching the good news of Christ. You can see Acts 17, 15, and 16 about that.

Now Luke does not record for us that Silas and Timothy ever found Paul in Athens, but many have suggested that they did and were sent back into Macedonia so they would have gone north once again to Paul before they joined him in Corinth.

So he meets up with them in Athens, he sends them back out, he goes on to Corinth, and then they later rejoin him. I tend to agree, and here's why.

In 1 Thessalonians 3, verses 1 and 2, Paul writes, Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith.

So I think, therefore, when we could bear it no longer, as Paul and Silas and Timothy, and then we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, as Paul and Silas, because they sent Timothy to the Thessalonians.

[23 : 38] Are you catching that? So at very least we can see that it's probable, it's very likely, that Timothy left them in Athens, and then Silas may have also been sent somewhere.

But either way, they come and they find him. They find him coming from Macedonia, they find him.

And when they find him, midway through verse 5, Luke records, in the ESV, Paul was occupied with the Word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

So we've seen him earlier in the text, right? He seems to be working during the week and attending the synagogue on the weekends, on the Sabbath, our Saturday. But here, Paul's occupied with the Word.

Acts 18.5 in the NASB translation says this, but when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the Word.

And I think that's a better rendering of the middle part of verse 5. That is to say, when Silas and Timothy came and joined Paul, he began to be occupied, meaning, he spent all week long.

[24 : 54] He was able to set aside tent making for the sake of spending more time in gospel proclamation. A bit of a proof to this, 2 Corinthians 11.9 And when I was with you, this is Paul, when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need.

I think he's referring to Silas and Timothy when they come from Macedonia, so I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. So they bring this provision to him which enables him to no longer be a tent maker but to devote himself fully to gospel proclamation, at least for this frame of his ministry.

God provides for his own. God cares for his people and this should greatly encourage our souls.

God cares, beloved, about every tiny little detail of your little life.

In Matthew chapter 10 verse 29, Jesus says, as recorded by Matthew, are not two sparrows sold for a penny, and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father.

So even this very cheap bird, which would have been the poor person's sacrifice at the temple, two sparrows sold for a penny are precious in God's sight, and yet we're more precious than those two sparrows.

[26 : 39] Luke, however, records the same speaking by Jesus. in this way, Luke chapter 12 verse 6, are not five sparrows sold for two pennies, and not one of them is forgotten before God.

So in one text we see that two sparrows are sold for a penny, and in another text we've got five for two pennies, which seems to confuse the price of sparrows. I suggest to you that if you were a poor person and you went to the temple and you bought four for two pennies, they threw in an odd sparrow.

And beloved, you and I are the odd sparrow. God cares for us. So God encourages the souls of His discouraged servants with new partners and with provision coming by the hand of old partners. And He also, and most importantly, encourages the souls of His discouraged servants with His presence. With His presence. Paul seems to be so discouraged at this point that God visits him in a vision.

In a very special way, he comes alongside Paul in a vision in verse 9. And he says, do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, why?

[28 : 09] For I am with you. For I am with you. Jesus made this very promise to the apostles in Matthew chapter 28, verses 18 through 20.

And Jesus came and said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

There's the great commission, the command given to all followers of Jesus Christ, and he ends it this way, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

And we do not want to forget that that wonderful promise at the end of verse 20 is coupled with Jesus' proclamation at the beginning of verse 18. all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

So we have the all-powerful ascended Jesus Christ with us always. How is it that God's presence is with us?

[29 : 16] Jesus, who is God, says to the apostles, I am with you always. And to Paul, for I am with you. And he says the same to all his people.

But how? How? How is this accomplished? Right? How is the presence of Christ experienced by his people? In 2 Corinthians 13-14, Paul writes this to the Corinthian believers, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

This is a classic Trinitarian text where we see all of the persons of the Godhead in a single verse. But today, note the phrase, be with you.

How is it? How is it that all of these aspects of who God is, is with us? It's by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, if you are regenerate, you are such because the very Spirit of God dwells within you. and He uses a tool to accomplish His purposes in our life.

[30 : 31] It's His Word. I cannot say it to you enough. I will not grow tired of saying, God's Word is authoritative.

It's powerful. It's inerrant. It is sufficient for our living. We live in an age where the Word of God is being altogether thrown out.

I have met across the past couple of weeks people who profess to follow Jesus Christ who have no familiarity with the Bible whatsoever. Just in talking with them about what the Gospel even is.

Regular attenders of churches in our area that have no idea. I attended a meeting of our association of churches this past week that lasted three and a half hours and the Bible was not referenced once.

a group of pastors, me and the Association of Missionaries, the only ones with Bibles on our table ready to use them. And as a note, I didn't get a chance.

[31 : 35] I was asked to pray so I packed a lot of scripture into my prayer at the end. Altogether in some cases, just entirely dismissed it.

But beloved, if we want to experience the presence of God, the Spirit of God is with us and He's going to use the Word to help us to do so. And I hope as a Christian you have spent time in God's Word, that you have been changed by it and that you have felt that presence in it.

God speaks to me through His Word. As I take it up and as I read it, I see and savor His goodness. He speaks into me.

The Bible reads me, exposes my sinfulness, leads me in obedience. obedience. I can be close to God because I have His Word.

Martin Lloyd Jones said this, and I just wanted to include, I put this on your bulletin, Andy, thank you for making it fit, because this is often the way I feel as I meet with God in His Word.

[32 : 41] Analogy by the great Dr. Lloyd Jones, a man and his little child are walking down the road and they are walking hand in hand. And the child knows that he is the child of his father and he knows that his father loves him and he rejoices in that and he is happy in it.

There is no uncertainty about it all, but suddenly the father, moved by some impulse, takes hold of the child and picks him up, carries him in his arm, kisses him, embraces him, showers his love upon him, and then he puts him down again and they go on walking together.

We need that experience and it is waiting for us by the power of the Spirit in His Word. Take it up and read. Whoever comes and whoever goes, Jesus is with us and Jesus is enough.

God encourages the souls of His discouraged servants with new partners, with provision, with His presence, and with protection.

In the same vision, middle part of verse 10, Jesus says to Paul, and no one will attack you to harm you.

[34 : 03] Luke tells us that Paul is able to minister for a year and a half without harm, which is a pretty astounding thing in the ministry of Paul. That does not mean that Paul didn't experience conflict.

He has set up camp, and I love that he did, right next door to the synagogue. The Jews didn't want to hear him anymore. He said, I'm going to go to the Gentiles, and he went right next door to the synagogue itself.

I am confident that across this year and a half, people just didn't go, yeah, yeah, Paul, let's ignore him for a while. They are still upset at him, but he does not receive harm.

And Luke records a specific conflict for our benefit. This story about Galio and the Jews bringing Paul before Galio is to make that point. Like, Jesus made a promise to him that he wouldn't be harmed and kept that promise, and here's an occasion that that happened.

So, Galio was the proconsul of Achaia, young in that position, some have supposed the Jews made a united attack on Paul because Galio was young.

[35 : 12] They knew they didn't have a legitimate claim against Paul, and so they thought that they could wrap him up in a power trip and get him to deliver some kind of judgment against Paul. And the charge they brought, verse 13, is this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.

And other times, the trial and execution of our Lord and Savior, Rome got involved in a way Rome should not have gotten involved.

But by God's providence, they did, and in this case, by God's providence, they didn't. Galio stayed out of it. If we're a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, oh Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint.

But he dismisses it rather. By God's grace, Galio issues a summary judgment and just throws the case out. From his perspective, the issue was merely an issue of semantics.

Clearly not. Paul is saying the one way to worship the true and living God is through the personal work of Jesus Christ. It wasn't just a matter of semantics, but from Galio's perspective, it was.

[36 : 24] Eh, the God of the Jews. Worship him however you want to. He viewed their charge as a theological debate and not as a matter of judicial concern.

I love that Luke records for us as Paul stands trial so many times. We're going to see a lot of Paul standing trial in the coming chapters of Acts. But in verse 14, he says, but when Paul was about to open his mouth, he got interrupted.

He didn't have to say anything and the charges were dismissed. Now, does following Jesus Christ mean that we'll never come to any harm?

Absolutely not. Those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted in some measure. People are going to dislike the message of Jesus Christ.

So, Paul certainly didn't avoid harm in other cases. He had been harmed up to this point. He will be harmed beyond this point. But at this time, a way that God encourages him as he protects him.

[37 : 28] And we can see that as the Jews are very unhappy with this dismissal of the charges that they brought, they turn, and I think it's right to understand this, we see they all seized.

Driven from the tribunal, verse 17, and they all seized Sosthenes. They all being those Jews who had brought this united charge against Paul.

Sosthenes, we find out in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 1 and 2, is a follower of Jesus Christ.

When Paul wrote that letter, he says, Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and our brother Sosthenes to the church of God that is in Corinth.

So, either A, Sosthenes was already a Christian, right? Much like Crispus, who was the prior leader of the synagogue, had become a believer with all of his family. Sosthenes could have also been a

follower of Christ and still there in charge.

He's already a Christian and he's persecuted, physically harmed for his faith. Or, I prefer the first one, so you know, but, or, he made the case against Paul poorly.

[38 : 43] He was the representative. He was the DA in this case. And he made the case against Paul poorly. And it was later that he became a Christian and they were furious with him because he didn't make the case well and therefore they beat him.

Point being, whether or not we escape harm, the promise that God is always in loving control remains true. He is with us.

He is in control. Romans 8, 31, what then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? So, we see this protection.

We pick up a little bit more about that protection and what it meant to Paul, I believe, by looking at verse 18. After this, Paul stayed, it's after this trial, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers that sailed for Syria and with him Priscilla and Aquila.

At King Cray, not very far away, they landed. He had cut his hair for he was under a vow. He shaved his head for he was under a vow. And this vow would have been a Nazarite vow.

[39 : 57] You can read about this if you're interested in it from Numbers 6. And this term Nazarite comes from the Hebrew word for consecrated or separated.

And Jews made vows to God to thank him for past blessing or to petition him for future blessing. I think in this case to thank him.

He's now, he's past this year and a half time, he's past this trial, and he has made a vow in order to thank God for his good pleasure in staying harm from him.

The criteria for a Nazarite vow were as follows. The person who made a vow had to abstain from alcohol, vinegar, or any food with grapes in it.

They had to allow their hair to grow until the period of time set forth in the vow was complete, so it might be 30 days, it might be 60 days, but they couldn't cut their hair during that time. Some of you may be familiar with Samson.

[40 : 59] Samson had made a lifelong vow, and he didn't do any of these things for his lifespan.

Third, they couldn't be made unclean by exposure to a dead body. Not really important at the time.

They had to avoid dead people as well. At the completion of the vow, the head was to be shaved, and a series of offerings were to be made.

There were three offerings that were to be made, and one of those offerings, the peace offering, the hair was to be placed on the same offering fire and burnt. This is the prescription found in Numbers chapter 6.

Now, the exact nature of Paul's vow is obscure, but as I said before, I think it was likely made for that past protection. It was a way that he was being thankful for what God had done for him.

And Paul did not see his adherence to Jewish tradition in contradiction with his faith in Jesus Christ, but in this case, practiced the spirit of this tradition as a matter of thanking God for what he had done.

[42 : 03] Now, of interesting note, and to that point, a Nazarite was meant to break the vow, end the vow, by shaving their head at the temple.

Paul's not at the temple in Jerusalem, is he? He's a long way from the temple in Jerusalem. Paul seems to be more concerned with the timing of his completion of the vow than the location of the completion of his vow.

So he shaves his head before going to Jerusalem. Now, how do I know that he went to Jerusalem? Well, I don't. I think I know he went to Jerusalem. Verse 22, Luke records this, when he had landed at Caesarea, which is north of Jerusalem, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.

And always in this day, Jerusalem was always up, and everything else was always down. So he went south to Jerusalem, and then he went north to Antioch, but Luke would have recorded it, he went up to Jerusalem, and he went down to Antioch.

So he likely took his hair with him, and went through some practice there in Jerusalem. So, God encouraged the souls of his discouraged servants with protection.

[43 : 21] And I just wonder how often we lose sight of God's good favor upon us, and the ways in which he keeps us safe and prevents harm for us.

And finally, God encourages the souls of his discouraged servants with purpose. With purpose. In verse six, you see a very, seemingly very fruitless ministry at the synagogue. They opposed and they reviled him. And when that happened, he did something that he doesn't do in most of the synagogues he goes to. He shakes out his garments, which was a sign of judgment. It was a way of saying, I don't even want the dirt I picked up in your presence to go with me. You have heard the gospel message and you have not responded in faith. It was a sign of judgment. And the language he uses is very strong to that end. Your blood be on your own heads. I am innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. And he doesn't mean that in an absolute sense. [44 : 23] We know that Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. He still will make a habit of going into the synagogue and preaching the gospel to the Jews. But he means there in that city and we see him go next door to the house of Titius Justice.

So even after declaring judgment against the Jews, Jews were converted. God still had a purpose. We see in verse 8, Crispus the ruler of the synagogue, which must have just enraged the Jews, believed in the Lord together with his entire household.

And they've been adding more to the number. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and they were baptized. The very last part of the vision that Paul sees, Jesus says to him, I have many in this city who are my people.

So the encouragement that he brings to Paul is this renewed vigor for his purpose. God has good purpose to save people.

And he reminds Paul of this by saying, keep going, don't be afraid, preach the good news of Jesus Christ because I have many in the city who are my people.

[45 : 39] People will respond by my intervention to the good news of the gospel. So Paul is able to say this. He writes to the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 1 through 5 which I read to you verse 3 previously.

He says, And when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom which they loved. For I decided to do nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. And my speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit and of power so that your faith may not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

And that purpose that God has given to each and every one of us ought to encourage us when we are discouraged. The point of our lives and certainly the point of the life of this church is not that we get together and huddle together.

Not that we create a safe environment for all of us to feel like we're not quite so weird in. But that we might gather together to be fueled and equipped in order that we would go.

[47 : 02] That's why we come together. And some of us are going to go back to campus or to a job or to our neighbor. Some of us are going to go much much further.

We should praise God for every mile that he covers with the good news of Jesus Christ using us. Beloved, our time is brief.

And Jesus Christ is coming back. Let us not be discouraged in our labor, but rather be encouraged with new partners, with provision, with his presence, with protection, and with purpose.

Let's pray together.