



Sunday 25th February 2018

7. PAUL [Don't try to cover all the questions!]

Paul was a remarkable character who was mightily used by God.

In AD 160 an Asian Christian wrote a description of Paul in these words: *'A man of little stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows meeting, and nose somewhat hooked, full of grace; for sometimes he appeared like a man and sometimes he had the face of an angel.'* Not the most flattering picture! In our study, we could look at his remarkable conversion, his extensive letter writing, the key theological perspectives he pursued, the expansion of or his boldness in pursuing the highest court in the Empire to plead the case of Christ; but I want us to dig a little deeper into the temperament of Paul and how he faced some of his struggles. There were certainly limitations that he experienced with the *'thorn in the flesh'* mentioned in **2 Cor 12.7-9**, a certain physical handicap that at times limited and restricted what he was able to accomplish.

We are particularly looking at Paul's experience when he travels 90 miles from Athens to **Corinth** and it is recorded for us in **Acts 18.1-17**.

Paul went to strategic centres to preach the gospel. Look at a map and see where Corinth is situated – between two seas there is a narrow isthmus of land. Corinth was a very busy commercial centre. Into its port came 'Arabian balsam, Egyptian papyrus, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Cilician goats-hair, Lycaonian wool, Phrygian slaves.' Often ships were unloaded at the port on one side of the isthmus and carried over to the other side and reloaded onto ships.

Corinth became one of the low points in Paul's life, low emotionally, spiritually, physically, financially.

- Can you imagine Paul being somewhat discouraged and downcast in spirit?
- Would anyone be prepared to share how they can identify with Paul?

Read **1 Cor 2.1-3** where Paul expresses how he came to Corinth *'in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.'*

- What could you envisage as being the presenting issues creating such struggles?
- Fear is not usually a quality that we associate with Paul and yet, it was very real. Paul certainly was not given the warmest welcome in the synagogue, **Acts 18.4-6**.

In this study I want us to see where the practical support came from that sustained Paul in his risk taking life.

1. THROUGH GOOD FRIENDSHIP

There was **AQUILA & PRICILLA Acts 18.2-3**

This couple had their own experience of suffering, as they were expelled from Rome for being Jews. Skilled in tent making they set up a business in Corinth and this is where Paul met them and worked with them. They are also mentioned in 1 Cor 16.9; Rom 16.3.

The work was in order to cover living costs for Paul in order not to be a burden on the believers who were in Corinth, 2 Cor 11.9. Paul shared accommodation with Aquila & Priscilla, v.3.

- In what way does God use friendship to support and strengthen us in our calling?

There was **SILAS & TIMOTHY Acts 18.5**

They would have brought news and stories of God at work in the church plants like Thessalonica. We are called to be workers together – and this is the power of good friendship.

- How do we go about building lasting mutually supportive relationships and sustaining them beyond the 'task' that might bring us together for a period of time?

2. THROUGH SEEING GOD AT WORK, Acts 18.7-8

It is interesting to see that when Paul is no longer teaching in the synagogue, he does not move very far, but next door to the house of **Titius Justus!**

There is the encouragement of **Crispus** and his entire household who come to faith and were baptised.

- In what ways can we celebrate God at work in order that the whole Body of Christ would be encouraged and strengthened in His work?

3. THROUGH DIVINE ASSURANCE, Acts 18.9-10

'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."

There was a 'vision' that surely lifted the heart of Paul.

Alan spoke of how Jesus was calling Paul to make a choice:

- **Choose not to be fearful** *'Do not be afraid.'*
- **Choose not to be silent with the good news** *'do not be silent'*
- **Choose to be assured of God's presence.** *'For I am with you...'*
- **Choose to be bold and courageous.** *'no one is going to attack and harm you.'*
- **Choose to stay and continue to work** *'because I have many people in this city.'*
- Do you ever get discouraged in the Christian life? What are some of the main sources of discouragement?
- In what ways would these features of Paul's vision strengthen him? How do they become a source of encouragement for ourselves?

Paul continued for 1½ years in Corinth – so the reality of deep assurance and encouragement certainly broke through and stabilised this risk taker.

There were many wonderful testimonies of changed lives in Corinth by the power of God – see **1 Cor 6.9-11.**

FOR YOUR OWN NOTES: