



Pastor Jeremy Woods

Keep Going

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Series: Grace & Grit

Acts 18:1-17

Two Cities Church, it is a joy to be with you. Let me lead off with a big "thank you." Thank you for being a launching pad for missions and ministry, not just right here in Winston-Salem but throughout our nation and throughout our world. It takes a lot of fuel to get a disciple, to get a ministry, to get a church, much less a new church, into orbit, and we are just one of many church planters and church plants you have helped launch farther, faster, and better. So thank you.

Thank you also for loving Coastway Church and my family and me so well. My wife Victoria is here with me today. We have felt your love so deeply and personally by your ministry of presence. You've not just been there for us; you've been there *with* us. I think about how, about three years ago, we were standing on the stage, and you sent the Motsinger family out from among you to join our church and to launch Coastway Church.

I think about how, as we were building our house, it was an exciting time; how Pastor Kyle and Margy were some of the first ones who came to celebrate with us right as our house was being built and after our house was built. I think about how Pastor Dave and Caleb are there to help us think and plan well for the future, how Pastor Stephen and Pastor Spencer came to preach at the beach, and it was awesome.

I think about how Kari is constantly sharing resources. But let me tell you, one of my favorite parts about our partnership. It's when so many of you show up to Coastway Church on a Sunday. There's something different about having Two Cities in the house. So, Two Cities, we feel the love from you, we have a deep love for you, and it is a joy to be with you.

So, here's where we are. Whether it's the Bible that's on your app or the Bible that's in your lap, go ahead and join me in Acts, chapter 18. As Pastor Kyle said, we are picking up in our *Grace & Grit* series today. I've so enjoyed this, by the way. I've been

watching from a distance. I haven't missed a message. It's like that Netflix show you just can't stop. Not going to miss an episode.

As Pastor Kyle mentioned, we're picking up in our 2 Corinthians series but with a twist...Acts 18. You know those moments in those movies or shows whenever the scene will pan and it will say, like, "Fifteen years ago"? That's a flashback. It's giving you the development of the characters and the plot and how you got to that point in the movie or the show, wherever you were picking up.

Well, today, that's what we're doing. We are picking up in Acts 18, and we're going to see the origin story of the church at Corinth. Here's why I think this text is so timely. Anytime the Lord calls you to do or pursue something of value, something with purpose, something with impact, here's what's going to happen without fail: you're going to get discouraged. You're going to be tempted to quit...quit loving, quit serving, quit sacrificing, quit trusting, quit forgiving, and quit repenting.

One of the things that's so pronounced in Scripture, especially in Acts, chapter 18... It's really the theme. And this is the whole idea. I just want to go ahead and give this to you today. God gives us courage when we want to quit. That's it. That's Acts 18. Think about it. How do you spell *encouragement*? Well, you don't do it without courage. *Courage* is right in the middle.

So, what is encouragement? *Encouragement* is when someone else puts courage in you. Here's what God wants to do. He wants to put courage in us so we can keep going for him. There's a story out there about a California gold miner who was caught up in the 1850s' California gold rush. He was out there. He was mining, he was mining, he was mining, hoping to hit pay dirt.

After a few months, guess what happened. He got discouraged and quit. He sold all of his equipment to some random guy who picked up where he left off, and it turned out he was three feet from gold. He should have kept going. He shouldn't have quit. Let me ask you this. I won't have you raise your hand, but this is all of us. Who has ever quit something?

Maybe you've quit a diet. Maybe Paleo became "fail-eo." Maybe Keto turned into Cheetos. Maybe you've quit the gym. Maybe you've quit a relationship. Maybe you've quit a job. Maybe you've quit *The Bible Recap*. Maybe you've quit church. This happens for all of us.

One of the ways we can know we're broken (let's just go ahead and play our hand right here) is we continue what we ought to quit, and we quit what we ought to continue. Here's what we're seeing today. That's exactly what the Enemy wants. He will unleash discouragement in your life when you're three feet from gold.

Let me be clear what we're talking about with gold. We're not talking about cash and prizes. We're not talking about health, wealth, and nothing else. The gold of the Christian life is when faith becomes sight. It's when promises are fulfilled. That's what the Enemy wants to prevent you from experiencing and enjoying in your life.

This is your "one" coming to faith. This is the marriage being rooted. This is the addiction being broken. This is the peace through the pain. This is the friend showing up just at the right time. I want to qualify this. Quitting and ending aren't the same things. There's a difference between the two.

What happens is there are some things in our lives that actually need to come to a necessary ending, need to come to a full stop. Here's a simple way to think about what needs to end in your life: anything that would stop you from loving God first or loving others best. That needs to come to a stop in your life.

But when we quit something, it's usually because we got really discouraged and really defeated. So, let me ask you this question. This is the leading question today: *Where are you discouraged?* Wherever that is, that's where you're most likely to quit. I want you to get that in your mind up front.

The question we wrestle with is what Acts 18 deals with. "How do I keep going whenever I feel like quitting?" I want to give you four forms of encouragement that we all need that lift straight out of Acts 18 today so we can keep going for God's glory. Take a look with me at Acts 18:1. ***"After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth."***

Right here, Paul is on his second missionary journey. He took three missionary journeys. He is in Greece. You might be thinking, "That must be nice. I wish I was in Greece right now." Well, understand the way Paul looked at geography was not through the lens of culture but through the lens of Christ. Where culture would see a vacation destination, Paul saw a place that was a target for gospel mission.

That's the way we think about Myrtle Beach. The culture looks at it and says, "Vacation destination." For us, the beach was a bonus, but it wasn't the basis. We saw God doing something, and we wanted to join him there. That's the way Paul is looking at this.

It says, "After this..." After what? Well, after he has just been engaged and involved in church planting in four big cities. He has been in Philippi. He has been in Thessalonica. He has been in Berea. He just left Athens. And what happened there? It's what happens with any church planter: some reception, much rejection.

So, Paul could be very discouraged at this point. No one would blame him if he quit. I mean, you just read Acts 16, you read the missionary journeys of Paul, and you're

like, "How does this guy keep going?" Here's how. It's because God gives him what he needs to keep going as he remains close and clean before the Lord.

Like Paul, we all need a lot of encouragement. Right? If we were to poll the people, I don't think anybody in here would raise their hand and say, "I am running on a surplus of encouragement. I don't need any. Do not encourage me right now." Nobody would say that, because we all could use more encouragement.

Here's the first form of encouragement I want to show you. Paul is going to be encouraged by *people*, and we all need to be encouraged by people. What is going to happen is the Lord is going to put people in Corinth who are going to encourage Paul there. Verse 2:

"And he [Paul] found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius [the Roman emperor] 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 tentmakers by trade."

What's going on here is the Roman emperor is pushing those who are preaching the gospel outside of the capital city of Rome. You may have never been exiled from a city for preaching the gospel, but maybe you've been exiled from a relationship. Maybe you've been exiled from a peer group, maybe even from a job, maybe even from a marriage.

Here's what happens anytime you preach the gospel: you can expect some reception at some point but much rejection, especially at first. As providence would have it, God has a plan. He has people in place to encourage Paul. What are the odds that he runs into Aquila and Priscilla? Here's the deal. Aquila and Priscilla were displaced and Paul was discouraged, and they meet with a shared heart.

What are the odds that Aquila and Priscilla are missing their church back at Rome and Paul just came to Corinth where they are at to plant a church right there? What are the odds that Paul is a tentmaker and Aquila and Priscilla are tentmakers and they are going to meet right here? Would you just think about it? Look at how good God is at this point. Paul has a roof over his head, he has a job, and he has godly friends with a godly marriage committed to doing ministry in a godless city.

So, there's much encouragement. Hope has been introduced, but take a look at what happens next. With Aquila and Priscilla having his back, Paul gets back to work. Verse 4: ***"And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks."***

Here's what I want you to see. Paul's message was very simple. It was very powerful. It was the power of the gospel. We know from 1 Corinthians 2:2 what his message was. He says, "I resolved to know nothing while I was among you except for Jesus Christ and him crucified." So, Christ crucified for sinners is the obsession of Paul.

You have to understand Corinth is not that different from Winston-Salem. It's not that different from Myrtle Beach. It's not that different from the everyday settings where we live, learn, work, and play. Here's why: there was religion and rebellion. Those are the two things you're going to see in any city, any state, any place.

The law-keeping Jews are the people who are good at being good and like to keep the rules. They get the gold stars in Sunday school. Paul's message to the law-keeping Jews was very simple. "Hey, on your best day you couldn't earn it. You are so bad that Jesus died because of you. Repent and believe in the gospel." How's that for upsetting? It's almost a trigger warning whenever Paul starts talking.

Then you have the rebellious Corinthians. They're lawbreakers. The Jews are law keepers. There was an idiom in the Greco-Roman world, "Act like a Corinthian." That means these guys were morally unhinged. No inhibitions whatsoever. It was a derogatory way of saying, "Hey, you're acting awful."

So, Paul's message to the Corinthians was, "On your worst day you couldn't forfeit salvation. There's actually a God who was sent from heaven who loved you so much who went to such a great length that he died instead of you, despite your rebellion. Repent and believe in the gospel." A very unpopular and upsetting message. Aquila and Priscilla are bringing the "Amen" corner. You preach better when people are responding and agreeing in the Lord with what's being said.

What happens right here is he gets more backup. Take a look at verse 5. The plot thickens. ***"When Silas and Timothy..."*** Those are some of Paul's closest church-planting partners. ***"...arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus."***

In the NBA, there is almost a rite of passage where if you want to dominate, you need to have what's called a *big three*, basically three dynamic players who can get it done, and then you have a couple of role players who round out the starting five. If you look at Paul right now, he has the big three: Paul, Silas, and Timothy. He has a starting five. He has Aquila and Priscilla.

Silas and Timothy have been on this missionary journey with Paul since the beginning. They are proven. They are durable church planters, so Paul is very encouraged right here. Here's what's interesting, though. They didn't come empty-handed.

See, what these guys were out doing (and this is what every church planter has to do) is they were out fundraising. They were raising funds for the work of Corinth from the churches in Macedonia. You guys have been hearing about this for the past two weeks. It's amazing the way that grace makes us generous, and grace had made the Macedonian churches generous. So, they were taking up this significant offering.

You're actually going to read about this and learn about this a little bit later in 2 Corinthians 11:9. Paul is going to mention that. The gift was significant enough so that Paul no longer had to make tents, but he could take the support that was raised from churches outside of Corinth and focus fully on preaching the gospel of grace. Here's the truth: when the grace of God is preached, people are changed.

How did Silas and Timothy raise all this money? Well, it was because grace makes us generous. Who was in the church at Philippi, the healthiest church in the New Testament, the most generous church in the New Testament? Lydia, who was just overrun by the grace train of the gospel, and the Philippian jailer whose entire household was baptized.

So, Silas and Timothy were like, "Hey, would you do for one what was done for you?" and they said, "I want there to be another jailer and his family in Corinth who sees what I've seen." Lydia said, "There's another Lydia in Corinth. I'm giving to this." So, that's where this comes.

By now Paul is encouraged. He's encouraged by people God has put around him. And it wasn't just any group of people God put around Paul. I want you to notice this. They were all spiritually mature people. Here's a principle I want us to see: *it takes maturity to endure difficulty*.

Paul has a lot to say about spiritual maturity. One of the big reasons he wrote at length to the church at Corinth... And if you've been listening in, he actually wrote four letters to the church at Corinth. "First" and "second" is actually "second" and "fourth." So, Christian advisory. There was some unrelenting content in one and three, and the Holy Spirit said, "We can't put that in there," so you have two and four right here.

So, Paul wrote a lot to the church at Corinth, and a lot of it was about spiritual immaturity. How do you know if you're becoming or dealing with a spiritually mature person? You might say, "I'm spiritually mature." Well, let's find out. There's a very simple way. Spiritually mature people are quick and slow. Spiritually mature people are quick to repent of sin and slow to relent through suffering.

How does a new and healthy church form? Well, my goodness! Two Cities Church, how did you get here? There was a core group of individuals and families who were

spiritually mature. How does a church form and flourish, mature and multiply? Through more families and individuals coming to faith and growing in spiritual maturity. A core group of spiritually mature people led by spiritually mature leaders can mature and multiply a church. It's one of the hardest things you'll ever do.

I'm convinced, after being closely connected to this house, this family, Pastor Kyle, your leaders, and you as a people for four years, one of the biggest reasons the favor of God is on this house, why the future is so bright for Two Cities Church, is because of spiritual maturity. The Word of Christ dwells in you so richly. This is why John Wesley said, "Give me 10 men who hate nothing but sin and love nothing but God and we will change the world."

So, instead of quitting, Paul is able to continue in a difficult calling. How about you? I want to ask you this question. Do you have spiritually mature people in your life, people who are quick to repent and slow to relent? I'm telling you, that's who you want in your life. We're not talking about your golf buddies. We're not talking about your drinking buddies. We're not talking about the cool kids.

It can be fun to be around those groups, but that's not going to build your faith and take you into the future. Who has been a Christian long enough to understand that? It's like, "I tried that. That didn't go so well for me." You need spiritually mature people. You need people who are not so puffed up they can't admit when they're wrong. You need people who have the resurrection vision that God finishes what he starts.

For that reason, we don't have to relent through suffering. ***"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us [on that day]."*** And what a day it will be. This is why... And you hear this ad nauseam around here because it's so important.

This is why going to the Weekender is so important. This is why your Community Group is relational, spiritual life insurance. This is why you need the DNA Group. You're not just needed; you're also needy, and that's where you form and flourish these spiritually mature relationships.

It's interesting that the very encouragement Paul needs to keep going is coming from God through spiritually mature people. Think about it from the perspective of Paul. He has a budget, and he has builders to build the church with him, but more discouragement is about to come, so more encouragement is going to need to come.

Here's the next form of encouragement he's going to see. He's going to be encouraged by *progress* in verses 6-8. I want to show this to you. Verse 6: ***"And when they [the***

Jews in Corinth] **opposed and reviled him...**" I want you to notice that Paul viewed his life as a replay of Jesus' life.

Put yourself in the sandals of Paul. How do you handle opposition? Probably not very well. You maybe think about canceling. Who has deleted a friend on Facebook? That "best friend forever" is no longer so friendly. Here's Paul, opposed and reviled. Who else was opposed and reviled before Paul? Jesus.

Paul is able to endure because he says, "I know a thing or two about the crucified life. It's not just something that happens once and then I'm over with it. It's a daily death to myself that participates in the heavenly life of Jesus." Here's what you're going to see. There is an alternative when you feel like quitting. I want to give this to you. Would you be faithful to an old assignment in a new way?

Watch what Paul does. I want to show you this in verse 6. **"...he shook out his garments..."** Taylor Swift had a song, "Shake it Off." There's nothing new under the sun. It's basically the same idea. Paul is shaking off the unteachable hearts of the Jews. Here's what happens. **"...and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent.'"** In other words, "Don't say I didn't warn you."

Here's what happens. He's not giving up; he's regrouping. "This approach to church planting in this place is not working out, so instead of tossing in the towel and being done with it, I'm just going to move on in faith, faithful to an old assignment in a new way." Here's what he says: **"From now on I will go to the Gentiles."**

Paul had a category for ending something. We all need to have a category for necessary endings. We all need to have boundaries in our lives. So, here's what Paul does. It's pretty simple, and we can learn a lot from it. He moves on from the unteachable Jews to pursue the impressionable Gentiles.

Here's a principle. There's a difference between quitting and ending. How do you know the difference? Here's how you know. It's actually very simple. When you quit something, it's because you're running *from*, but when you end something, it's because you're running *to*. Paul is ending, not quitting.

When you quit something, you're running *from*. "Get me out of here! This is hard. *Those* people and *that* place are the problem. I'm having to share an Airbnb with Aquila and Priscilla. These are not comfy quarters for me." No, no, no. That's not what Paul does. Instead of running *from* something, saying, "*Those* people and *that* place are the problem..." By the way, if you have a problem with every person, you have a problem. There. It's pretty simple.

How do you know when you're ending something because you're running *to* something? "What if this were an opportunity for me to be faithful to an old assignment in a new way?" That's what Paul is doing right here. At some point, the place may change, but more often than not, God is calling us to plant fresh seeds in old soil in the same place.

Imagine just for a moment if Paul had quit. He would not have been equipped to continue. The *church* wouldn't have been equipped to continue, Paul wouldn't have had a church to write to, and all the encouragement we get from these letters is erased.

So, here's the idea. If you are tempted to quit, you need to ask a question first. "If I stop this hard thing I'm doing, will I be running *from* God's work or *to* God's work?" What is the call of every Christian? We are missionaries, and where God is working we join him there.

As Paul does this, it's remarkable. Faithful to an old assignment in a new way. He sees great progress. Verse 7: ***"And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue."*** Location, location, location. How about this? That setback is about to be a setup. See what happens.

Verse 8: ***"Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household."*** Remember that gift the Philippian jailer gave so there could be another Philippian jailer's household that comes to faith in Corinth? Giving moves the mission forward. It made it possible for *this* to happen.

"And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized." I want you to see this. In the Christian life, what is progress? *Progress* is responsiveness. You know you're not making progress in the Christian life whenever your heart is hard, your hands are closed, and you're not responsive anymore.

So, "Titius Justus, a worshiper of God." What does that mean? That doesn't mean he was a Christian yet; it means his heart was open and he needed someone to whom he was their "one" to come and share the gospel message very clearly with him. Here's what's interesting. Many scholars suggest Titius had another name, and that was *Gaius*, who is mentioned as being baptized by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:14 and, in Romans 16:23, as hosting the church in Corinth.

So, great progress is being made. Things are actually going remarkably well at this point. Think about it from Paul. He's a church planter. He has a budget, he has builders, and now he has a building. He's a very encouraged church planter. All that's

missing now are baptisms, but we just saw that with Crispus and his household, and many other Corinthians take that step.

Just think about this for a minute. I don't know if you noticed this in verse 8, but Crispus was in charge of the synagogue that rejected Paul's message. Talk about a Holy Spirit clapback. Like, "Take that, Devil!" The leader of the Jews who attacked Paul just joined Paul. All this progress comes from Paul being humble enough and prudent enough to adapt, being faithful to an old assignment in a new way, refocusing his efforts.

I want to ask you this question. How would your outlook change if you were to be faithful to an old assignment in a new way? It's so easy to quit. Have you tried counseling? I've heard professional counseling described as bringing in someone to help loosen a knot you can't untie.

Have you thought about maybe putting your phone to bed instead of letting your phone put *you* to bed? Have you tried Scriptures before screens? Have you considered "Maybe it's not best for my walk with Jesus for me to date people who don't love and follow Jesus, who cross-examine my walk with Jesus"? There was something to it for Paul. There might be something to it for us.

So, Paul is encouraged by people. He's seeing progress. What's next? He's going to be encouraged by God's *presence*. Verse 9: "***And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision...***" When you hear *vision*, think *verse*. God gives Paul the word he needs for the work he is doing.

It's good to realize how the New Testament has not been printed and collected into an organized canon of 66 books at this point. Before the composition of the New Testament and everything was penned and it was organized in our Bibles, like we have today... That's only about 200 to 300 years old, by the way. We're very privileged to have such access.

Before that happened, what would happen was someone, while praying, while seeking the Lord, like Paul, might receive a verse through a vision. How do we receive vision? By going to verses. If you want to see somebody who doesn't have vision...no spiritual vision for their home, for their job, for personal holiness...it's probably because they have a deficiency of verses.

This is not prescribing (I want to be clear) that we go out and say, "Lord, unless you speak to me in a vision, I'm quitting." Don't do that. Bad application. Okay? I need to clarify. This *is* saying, "You need to be close enough to the Lord to hear his voice." The question we have to ask ourselves is "Is the reason I have no vision because I am so far away from verses?"

What would it look like for you to come in close and get vision from God by coming close to God? There's a good chance Paul was on his knees praying right here. That's how Peter got that vision in Acts, chapter 10, if you press rewind. He was praying.

Now, Paul is doing a very difficult work for the Lord, and he needs a timely word from the Lord, and, man, he gets it. Look at verse 9. ***"Do not be afraid..."*** Let me ask you this. What are you afraid of? Think about it. God's word to Paul might be a word for you today. ***"...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."***

It's interesting. The most frequent command in Scripture is "Do not be afraid." It's estimated 365 times throughout Genesis to Revelation. "Fear not." But here's what's also interesting. What's the most frequent promise? "I am with you." This shows up four times as many as "Do not be afraid," 1,535 times. "I am with you."

What does that tell us? You're four more times more likely to quit when you're afraid, and God says, "I want to give you four times as much encouragement and four times as many reminders for you to keep going." What's the biblical basis for courage and endurance? It's God's presence.

Here's a silly way to think about it. As you can see, I do not have a coastal complexion, but God has a sense of humor. He sent my family and my fair skin to plant a church at the beach. Guys, I have three skin conditions: pink, peeling, and pale. I see some of you understand. I have a healthy fear of the sun. I won't have you raise your hand if you're commiserating with me right now, but I do.

Between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., I have a 15-minute shot clock before solar anxiety sets in. But there's one thing that whenever it's present gives me courage to face the sun. SPF 50, baby! Sunscreen. I cover up with that. When I am covered in sunscreen, when sunscreen is present, I have the courage to face the sun. I know it's silly. Some of you are smiling. But when God's presence is your covering, you will have the courage to keep going.

How do we position ourselves in God's presence? I want to give you this really quickly. Four ways. *Obedience*. What was the last thing God told you to do? Do it. What was the last thing God told you *not* to do? Don't do it. Stop doing it. Next, *personal Bible intake*. Did you know studies continually show that those who read their Bible just four times a week have less anxiety, are less bitter, are less lonely, and less angry? Do you want a word from God? Go to the Word of God.

Then *prioritize environments where God's Word is clearly preached, discussed, and applied*. Right here. There's no better place. Then, finally, *prayer*. Something like this. Maybe just put some words to your worries. "God, I know you're with me." If you're a

Christian, stop saying, "God, would you be with me?" He said, "I'm with you" 1,535 times. Let's say, "God, I know you're with me. Would you personalize your presence in this area that makes me so afraid?"

Watch what happens after Paul is encouraged by God's people and progress and presence. Verse 11: **"And he stayed a year..."** He stayed. That's a timely word for some of you today. He saw this encouragement, and he stayed. He didn't quit. **"...a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."** In other words, Paul kept going when he could have quit.

I want you to understand. I want to encourage your heart today that God is going to give you these same encouragements that he gave to Paul. Here's the final form of encouragement. This is the one I'm most excited to talk about, and we're going to close our time with this.

Paul is going to be encouraged by *providence*. What is providence? It's God's ongoing commitment to order and organized outcomes for your good and his glory. Did you know that what God creates Satan counterfeits? So, what is the counterfeit vision and version of providence that the culture likes to talk about? Good luck. Luck is the off-brand version of providence. We have something bigger. We have something better.

Who understands we have something more beautiful than luck? We have providence. God's providence is seen when something very good comes from something very bad. Have you been there? Do you know what's interesting? Romans 8:28, which is one of Christians' favorite verses, probably top 10...

Paul wrote his letter to Rome from Corinth, and here's what Romans 8:28 says. He would have been surrounded by the work in Corinth when he wrote this. **"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."** That's a providence verse. So, here's what I want to say to you. If you are sinking in discouragement, I want to invite you to consider deeply the providence of God.

Look at this and see where it shows up. Verse 12: **"But when Gallio was proconsul..."** That's the highest government figure in the region. **"...of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul..."** More discouragement. **"...and brought him before the tribunal..."** They're pressing charges. **"...saying, 'This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.'"** At this point, Paul could say, "God, where are you? You just promised you would be with me. It's not looking good." Verse 14:

"But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio 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..."

He's the guy who took Crispus' job. The Spirit is just running up the score at this point. ***"...and beat him in front of the tribunal."*** Why did he get beaten? We're not entirely sure. It was a bad day for Sosthenes. He was going to need a lot of mercy and a lot of ministry after this. I wonder who would give that to him. Take a look. ***"But Gallio paid no attention to any of this."***

With the few minutes we have left I want to talk about the *where* of providence, the *how* of providence, and the *what* of providence. So, the *where* of providence. Where do you see providence in Acts 18? You see providence... What are the odds that Paul finds Aquila and Priscilla? Trusted scholars say that 750,000 people were in Corinth at this point. What are the odds? Well, you don't need odds when you have providence.

What are the odds that this pagan proconsul won't even hear the charges that are brought against Paul? I mean, this did not go well for... There was a big backfire for this Jewish angry mob. Then Sosthenes. Who is Sosthenes? Well, here's what's interesting. In 1 Corinthians 1:1, the first name that's mentioned is Sosthenes. Many scholars believe he would go on to be a big leader in the early church, leading the church at Corinth.

So you see it. It's all over right here. But how does God's providence help us keep going? It's very simple. It helps us look back, and it helps us look forward. It helps us look back and go, "What are the odds that something so good would come from something so bad?" You've been there.

What are the odds that something so good would come from that loss? What are the odds that something so good would come from that injury? What are the odds that something so good could actually come out of that addiction, out of that divorce, when you lay it at the feet of Jesus and say, "God, would you renew me? Would you encourage me?"

Here's what providence also does. It helps us look forward and have the ability to say, "I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future, and I'm not going to think about it apart from the grace of God. God is with me, and he goes before me." Lastly, what was the lens Paul was looking through? It's the lens *we* must look through. It was the cross and the resurrection.

Here's what the cross does. It says you have the grace to keep going, because you *are* going to quit. There *are* going to be times. Resurrection says you have the assurance

to keep going. God finishes what he starts. He's on time, every time. For the joy set before Jesus, he endured the cross. He didn't quit. He said, "It is finished." And when your faith is in his finished work, you can keep going. You can do it.

I want to ask you *this* question, and then I want to pray for you. Where do you need the courage to keep going? I want to ask the Spirit to personalize that right now. Would you bow your heads and open your hearts? I'm going to ask you to respond to this. If you are here today, and you need one or more of these forms of encouragement that we see in Acts 18...

You need some people in your life. You need some progress. You need God's presence. You need renewed confidence in God's providence. I want to ask you right here, publicly... Would you raise your hand right now where you're at if you need one or more of these four encouragements we talked about? Let's bow our heads. I want to pray for hands lifted all over this room.

Lord God, thank you that you finish what you start. We can't think of a situation in life where we don't need one or more of these encouragements. So, would you do for us what you did for Paul? Would you renew our strength? Would you remind us of the cross and the resurrection? Would you give us the courage we need to keep going for you, knowing how far you first came for us? In Jesus' name we pray, amen.