

**KEEP ON SPEAKING**

Acts 18:1-18a (Key verse: 18:9)

*One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent."*

Before we look at today's passage, I want us to look at a map of places Paul visited in his first and second mission journeys. **(Slide 1)** Here the orange line indicates Paul's first mission journey with the purple line indicating his second mission journey. It's a lot of places, right! **(Slide 2)** Let's zoom in on the orange line. Paul departed from Antioch, where his home church was located (13:1-3) and first traveled by boat through Cyprus (13:4-12) then he sailed to Perga in Pamphylia (13:13) from where he went on to Pisidian Antioch in Galatia. (13:14) From there he went to Iconium (14:1-6), then Lystra (where Paul was almost stoned to death) (14:7-20), and finally Derbe (14:20), where he turned around to go back home the same way he came; except he passed by Cyprus to arrive safely back in Antioch. (14:21-28) Why did the Holy Spirit send Paul so far away to visit all these cities? Was it for Paul to enjoy holiday? No. The Lord Jesus had many people in each of these cities. Yet they were still living in sin. So Jesus sent Paul to them **to SPEAK from scripture about Jesus; so they could hear the gospel, believe it and be saved from their sin!**

What about the second missionary journey? **(Slide 3)** As we can see, this was a much longer journey, right!? Paul again set out from Antioch. But this time, he took a short cut to the north. Can you see he went straight to the believers in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch in Galatia? To check up on the believers there and SPEAK more to them about Jesus. (15:36-16:5).....Thereafter, Paul tried to enter the province of Asia in the south (**quickly return to slide 1**), but the Holy Spirit kept him from preaching there. (16:6) When he came to the border of Mysia, he tried to enter Bithynia to the North. But the Spirit of Jesus again would not allow him to. (16:7) **(Slide 4)** Instead, the Lord Jesus sent Paul further west, to SPEAK the gospel message to the people in Macedonia!! (16:8-10) So Paul sailed from Troas to Philippi. (16:12) From there he went to Thessalonica (17:1-9) but when the Jews again persecuted him, Paul went further south to Berea (17:10-13) and from there to Athens. (17:14-34)

Here I want to ask another question. Why do you think Jesus did not allow Paul to enter Asia or Bithynia? Yes, it was because Jesus had many people in Macedonia who lived in sin. Jesus wanted to save them first. And the only way to do so was for them to hear and believe the gospel message. Then who had to SPEAK the gospel message to these people? Yes, it was Paul's job. Wherever the Lord sent Paul, he always SPOKE from scripture about Jesus. No matter how terrible his sufferings or how severely the Jews persecuted him.....Paul NEVER EVER stopped SPEAKING about Jesus! He never remained SILENT! As a result, many....many people (I think thousands) heard and believed the gospel message; and became children of God.

Yet in today's passage, Paul stopped SPEAKING about Jesus in Corinth. He became SILENT! This seems odd, right?! Was it because Paul completed his task? Did he SPEAK to everyone the Lord wanted him to speak to? No!! At the time the Lord still had many people in Corinth who did not hear the gospel message. (10) Then why did Paul stop SPEAKING about Jesus. It was because of fear. Fear of being attacked and harmed gripped Paul's heart! Fear closed Paul's mouth and caused him to become SILENT. It is no different with us today. Fear SILENCE us and so robs many of Jesus' people from hearing the gospel message. So how can we overcome our fears to keep on SPEAKING about Jesus? How can we gain new strength to endlessly share the word of Jesus with others? Let's learn from today's key verse. May the Holy Spirit open our hearts to receive Jesus' word this morning! Amen.

Look at verse 1: After a short yet productive visit in Athens Paul left the city and went to Corinth. Now like Athens, Corinth was also a huge cosmopolitan city with over 500 000 people! There was however one HUGE difference between the two cities. Where Athens were well known for its idol worship and philosophers.....Corinth on the other hand was a city with a remarkable reputation for loose living; especially sexual immorality! This was because the temple of Venus, the goddess of fertility, sexuality and love was located in Corinth. How do you think people worshipped Venus? Yes, through dirty and degrading acts of prostitution and fornication, facilitated by the 1 000 so called priestesses serving at the temple. (They were nothing than prostitutes) The practices at this temple was so bad and its influence on the population so far reaching..... that in classical Greek, to act like a Corinthian meant to practice fornication or prostitution. And

to have Corinthian companion meant to sleep with a prostitute. For everyone in Corinth did it! This explains why people in the Roman Empire used the word “corinthianized,” to describe someone who had become **totally useless** due to sexual immorality.

The question is, why did the Lord Jesus sent Paul to this city? It was because Jesus had many people in this city! (10) People who lived in sin and never heard about Jesus. Yet, whom Jesus chosen for Himself. Jesus wanted to save them from sin. Jesus wanted to deliver them from their dirty lives of sexual immorality and call them to live a new life in obedience to God. Then how could they be saved? How could they be transformed? Yes!! They had to hear the gospel message of Jesus. And not only hear it but believe and accept it in their hearts, right!?! Then the Holy Spirit would give them a new life! Then who would **SPEAK** to them from scripture about Jesus? Yes, Jesus appointed and sent Paul to do so.

Paul, however, had one challenge when he arrived in Corinth. He did not have any money to pay rent, buy food and other necessities. Look at verses 2-3. (Read) Wow! Did you know Paul was also a tentmaker!! I thought he was just an intellectual and educated man; and expert in the law of God, a philosopher, a preacher and a writer! But amazingly, Paul was not only intelligent but also a handy tentmaker!!

So shortly after arriving in Corinth, the Lord led Paul to meet a Jewish man named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. Guess what!?! They were two tentmakers! (What are the chances?! ) Like Paul, they had also recently arrived in Corinth from Italy. So they needed an extra pair of hands to build up their tent making business in the city. They even had an extra room in their house! So without thinking twice, Paul went to see Aquila and Priscilla. And by God’s providence, they agreed not only to give Paul a job but also allowed him to stay with them.

But as we know, getting a job is one thing.....and actually doing the work is another! Like any other job in those days, tent making was labor intensive and extremely tiresome. Paul had to sit .....long hours..... under severe time pressure..... Tediously knitting camel or goat hair to produce strips of cloth. Then, he had to sew the strips together to make quality tents for the clients.<sup>1</sup> This doesn’t seem like a nice job, right? It was repetitive, with many tight deadlines and many difficult clients. Yet, if that was what needed to be done for Paul to **SPEAK** from scripture about Jesus in Corinth, then that was what Paul did.

Look at verse 4. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. Despite working long hours every day of the week, Paul always remembered the main purpose for being in Corinth.....it was not to make money, settle down and live a comfortable life.....Instead, it was to **SPEAK from scripture about Jesus**. This he faithfully did EVERY Sabbath. Look again at verse 4. It is says Paul reasoned with the Jews and Greeks, trying to persuade them from scripture that Jesus is the Christ! (17:1-3) Have you ever tried to reason with someone who held a different view on something than you? Have you ever had to persuade someone of something they were heavily against? It’s not easy right!?! In fact, it is quite tiresome and requires a lot of patience and perseverance. Especially if one is tired after a long day and week at work! Yet, every Sabbath, this was exactly what Paul did! He reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

The question is: why did Paul do this? Why after a long week’s work did he sacrifice his free time to **SPEAK** to people about Jesus? It was because Paul wanted to lovingly obey God’s purpose for his life: to **SPEAK** to people in Corinth from scripture about Jesus. What is your main purpose in life? I can confidently tell you that since you are a believer and child of God, it is no different from Paul’s. Sadly, the world leads us to believe that our main purpose in life is to earn money so that we can buy things.....pay the bills.....and go places. So like unbelievers we make it our purpose to earn money. Right?! But that is not why the Lord has left you in me in this world. Instead, like Paul, the Lord’s main purpose for our lives is to obey Him and carry out His will for our lives. And to **SPEAK** from scripture to others about Jesus, is something that every believer is called to do! In this context, money is a mere means to an end. Money is the means and the end is to obey the Lord Jesus in our lives. How? By keep on **SPEAKING** from scripture to those the Lord sends us to. Just like Paul.

Let’s look at verse 5. After some time, Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia. (17:14-15)

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20121101/did-you-know/>

According to 2 Corinthians<sup>2</sup>, Silas and Timothy brought financial support to Paul from the Christians in Philippi. This allowed Paul put aside tent making for a while and to devote himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. Then how did the Jews respond? Look at verse 6. They first rejected the gospel message. Then they opposed Paul and became abusive. It's heartbreaking, right!? Especially after Paul devoted himself exclusively to meet with these Jews day and night to SPEAK from scripture about Jesus! Like any of us would have been, Paul was visibly upset by their response. Look again at verse 6 and also 7. Paul shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles. Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. We can only imagine how upset Paul was with the Jews. How discouraged and even hurt he was after spending all his effort and time to SPEAK to them about Jesus. Yet all he got in return was opposition and abuse. If this was me I would seriously began to doubt whether SPEAKING about Jesus is really worth it, right?! I would even quit, for why bother if no one listens, right?! But what did Paul do? **He simply shifted his focus from the Jews to the Gentiles.** Then something amazing. Look at verse 8. Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord! After him many of the Corinthians who heard Paul also **believed** and were baptized into Christ Jesus! The reason the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive was not because there was something wrong with the gospel message.....nor was it because of how Paul shared it with them. The real problem was the Jews' hearts. We can be certain that there will be many people we SPEAK to about Jesus who will respond to our message just like the Jews. But like Paul, we must not quit! But simply **shift our focus to someone else!** For surely Jesus has many people in this city also who will gladly accept the gospel message.

The reality, however, is that it is not so easy to simply brush off the rejection and abuse we receive when we SPEAK to others about Jesus. It was no different with Paul. In the past, he did not pay much attention the Jews' abuse towards him. This time, however, in a moment of weakness, fear of once again being attacked and harmed by the Jews, gripped his heart. Flashbacks of the angry faces of the Jews in Iconium who plotted to mistreat and stone Paul shot through his mind. (14:5) He also painfully relived the terrifying experience of being stoned in Lystra, and left for dead. (14:19) In fact, everywhere Paul went on the first and second missionary journey..... the Jews always came after him! So Paul was certain that it would be no different in Corinth! Yet this time, his heart hit a spiritual slump,

So what did Paul decide to do? Yes! He decided to stop SPEAKING about Jesus! And be SILENT. Humanly speaking it is understandable, right!? For who would blame Paul to do whatever is necessary in that situation to protect his own life? No one would. In fact, I am sure we will tell Paul its best to just focus on making tents again?! But what about Jesus? In this situation what did He say to Paul? Let's look at our key verse. Can we please read verse 9 together? One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. Jesus told Paul: keep on speaking, do not be silent. At first this sound quite harsh, right? How could Jesus expect Paul to keep on SPEAKING when this placed his life in danger? Yet.....Jesus could say this because He is Almighty God..... who was with Paul..... and in full control of the situation. Look at verse 10. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you. The reason Paul was gripped by fear was because he took His eyes off Jesus to look at the threatening situation around him. Just like Peter when he walked on the water towards Jesus. Do you remember the story? How Peter confidently walked on water as long as he kept his eyes fixed on Jesus. Only to sink when he turned his eyes away to look at the wind and crashing waves around him. (Mat 14:22-33) All this time, Jesus was with Paul! Therefore, Paul did not have to be afraid, for Jesus would make sure that no one attacks and harm Paul in Corinth.

But this begs the question: Why did Jesus want Paul to keep on SPEAKING about Him in Corinth? Look again at verse 10. Because Jesus had many people in that city. In other words, there were still many people in Corinth whom Jesus wanted to save from their sins. But for this to happen, they needed an opportunity to hear the gospel message and believed it; right?! But this would be impossible if Paul remained SILENT. For there was no one else to share the gospel message in Corinth, except Paul. Jesus could not abandon His people in Corinth. So, He appeared to Paul in a vision and spoke words of encouragement into Paul's heart.

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<sup>2</sup> 11:8-9

Paul deeply accepted Jesus' words into his heart. Look at verse 11. So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. Paul's situation did not change. Then how could he overcome his fear? How could he keep on SPEAKING the word of God to the people in Corinth? It was because, Jesus' word changed Paul's heart. It removed his fear! It allowed hope of success to spring up within him. And gave him clear direction of exactly what he needed to do. Perhaps most importantly, Jesus' words assured Paul that Jesus was with him and would continue to protect and guide him.

In conclusion. As believers we are all called to SPEAK from scripture about Jesus to others. Jesus has many people in this city. People who live hopelessly in sin without any hope of change and salvation. Then who will tell them about Jesus? Who will reason with them from scripture until the Lord opens their hearts to receive Jesus as their savior? Just like Paul, the Lord has called you and me to do so! Whether it is at work.....or at home.....or on campus.....there is someone who belongs to Jesus that needs to hear the gospel message from you and me.

But how can we overcome our fears to keep on SPEAKING about Jesus? How can we gain new strength to endlessly share the word of Jesus with others? Only when we listen and accept Jesus' words in our hearts. For only Jesus' words can strengthen our inner beings to overcome all the hardships and difficulties. Only Jesus' words gives us clear direction. Only Jesus words gives us hope. Lastly, only Jesus' words convicts our hearts that He is with us and will surely protect us to do all that the He has called us to do! Please, let us all receive and accept Jesus words to Paul also in our hearts this morning. Jesus said: *"Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you."* Amen!