

Acts 18

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[0 : 00] Acts chapter 18. I'm not massively into surprises.! I'm not most surprises anyway.!

You know those texts that you get? Can we get together for a chat sometime? How do you feel when you get them? Let me tell you as your minister. Oh, they're leaving. Or they're unhappy or something like that.

I'm someone who knows. Who likes to know what to expect. I think surprises are overrated. One of the reasons I love the Bible is because the Bible is very interested in letting you and I know what to expect.

And both now and in the future. I love that the Bible tells us what God is aiming to do in my life every day by His Spirit.

I love that the Bible tells me what is it going to be like to persevere with Jesus Christ for the years ahead. I love that the Bible tells me what it's going to cost me and what it will reward me.

[1 : 25] I love that the Bible tells me some of the things that will happen when I die. It tells you what it will be like to be with Jesus in His heavenly kingdom.

And reading the Bible eliminates lots of surprises. And that's one of the reasons that I want you to love Acts chapter 18. Because it shows you and I what we should expect.

The shape of our expectations in the area of telling people about the Lord Jesus of gospel ministry. That is, God wants you and I to know what it's going to be like when we share the good news of the Lord Jesus with others.

And one of the things God uses the book of Acts in is that He shows what happened to the first Christians, those first century Christians. He shows us the pattern, the emerging pattern of what life should be like so that we will have our expectations shaped.

And what we see in Acts is affirmed by the rest of the New Testament that we can expect certain things to happen as they happened back then. And so I want to look at Acts 18 because we see the shape of gospel ministry as clearly there as anywhere.

[2 : 45] That's it. Go for it. And there's four key elements. All right? And the point is this. What happened 2,000 years ago will shape our expectations today.

What will happen this week when you tell people about the Lord Jesus? If we were to talk about the Lord Jesus with our nearest and dearest and our friends and neighbours, what will happen?

Well, four things. All right? Firstly, let's pay attention to the nature of the apostolic work, of the work of the apostles. Paul is regarded as an apostle and some of his friends and colleagues in Acts 18, they're not apostles, technically, but they are helping Paul with his mission.

And so let's pay attention to the apostolic work, the apostolic mission, this work of sharing Jesus.

And one of the pictures that you find in Acts 18, I don't know whether you picked it up in the reading, is wonderful collaboration in the work of sharing Christ.

You see, Paul's relationship with the husband and wife, Priscilla and Aquila, who he meets for the very first time in this chapter, but they become lifelong companions in gospel work.

[4 : 00] Then there's Apollos, who we meet for the very first time in this chapter, but he came to be regarded as a really important contributor to the work of the gospel. It's wonderful to read about that collaboration.

Paul was not a one-man band. But what about the work that they do? What do they consider their responsibilities to be? Just follow with me for a moment if you can.

And let me point to you all, point out all the main verbs used in this chapter. What is a verb? What is a verb? A doing word. That's right, isn't it?

It's an action. Listen to the verbs. I want you to see the interesting thing. So verse 4, can you see it? Paul reasoned with the people in the synagogue as he tried to persuade them that the gospel is

true.

Verse 5, testifying that Jesus is the Messiah. Verse 11, Paul has spent a year and a half teaching God's word in Corinth.

[5 : 02] When Paul gets to Ephesus, verse 19, what does he do? He reasons with people in the synagogue, just like he had in Corinth, verse 4. Verse 23, we read about him travelling around strengthening disciples in various places, no doubt by the things that he said.

And he taught. that are the verbs that describe Paul's ministry in this chapter. What about Apollos? Verse 25, we find him joining in on the act.

It says he was speaking fervently, teaching about Jesus. Verse 26, he speaks boldly in the synagogue. When he gets to Achaia, in verse 28, he is vigorously refuting his opponents.

Now, just one little side note. Look at verse 24. Apollos is described, isn't it, as someone who has a thorough knowledge of the Bible. Quite literally, Apollos was somebody strong in the Scriptures.

I think that's an amazing thing to say about someone, isn't it? Imagine somebody described you, what are they like?

[6 : 11] They say, well, actually, they're really, they're strong in the Scriptures. I would hope all of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus, we would aspire to be like Apollos in this. If you're a young person, if you're somebody who's a teenager and people endlessly ask you, what do you want to do?

What do you want to be? What are your plans for A-levels and then university? What do you think after university? What's your ambition for your life ahead? Let me give you an ambition which is more precious than many of the other things that people go on about.

It would be of infinite value to you children and to you young people if you were able to say, what I want to be is strong in the Scriptures. What a great ambition. Now back to the apostolic work.

We've talked about the verbs that Paul used to describe his own work. We've talked about Apollos but look at Priscilla and Aquila who we hear about in verse 26. They hear apostles teaching ministry and they discover that Apollos only knew about the baptism of John the Baptist.

So they get him round for lunch, they get him together with him and they tell him everything else that he needed to know. Presumably things like the day of Pentecost and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And the verb that is used of them in verse 26 is they explained.

[7 : 33] They explained to Apollos and they made sure that he had a full understanding. Now can you see the pattern that's emerging from Acts 18? almost all the verbs that he used to describe Paul and his companions are verbs of speaking.

The heart of apostolic ministry, the shape of New Testament ministry is that people open their mouths to make Jesus known. speaking, teaching, testifying, refuting, explaining, strengthening. And so is it any wonder when Jesus turns up on the scene in a vision we read about here in verse 9, one night, what's the main exhortation of verse 9? What's the big message for Paul?

Keep on speaking. And Jesus is the one they speak about. And what Paul and his companions are seeking to convince people of is that Jesus is the king, Jesus is the messiah.

If you want to know the content of their message, Acts 18 underlines again in verse 5 and then in verse 28, what is the apostolic message?

[8 : 52] It is convincing people that Jesus is the messiah, Jesus is the king. And you and I today who have bowed to Jesus' kingship, continue to exercise this ministry.

Jesus is Lord. And so our message is this really, isn't it? Jesus is Lord and what are you going to do about it? And if you're somebody who's maybe here and we're really thrilled that you're here but you haven't bowed your knee and confessed with your mouth that Jesus Christ is king, what are you going to do with him?

The second thing in Acts 18 it shows us about the shape of gospel ministry is that speaking about Jesus will produce some opposing reactions, opposing responses.

And that certainly happens in this chapter just like we've seen it happen all the way through Acts. In verse 5 we learned what Paul is preaching to the Jews in Corinth very kind of devotedly and then in verse 6 we see how they reacted and it says they opposed Paul and literally they became abusive.

He shook out his clothes he says to them your blood be on your own heads I'm innocent from now on I'll go to the Gentiles. As a Jew himself it was Paul's habit to go first to his own people in the synagogue wherever he went to a new city.

[10:18] And the same is true here but they respond abusively to him. And so Paul has got no qualms from turning away from the Jewish ministry at this point in order to take the good news to the Gentiles the rest of the world.

And verse 7 tells us that he went next door and he starts sharing with a man who had a very Roman named Titus Justice. And there's a strong reaction against Paul.

Verse 12 and 13 says when Galio was proconsul of Achaia the Jews made a united attack on Paul and they brought him before the tribunal they dragged him into court saying this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.

And Galio is a wise owl you can see this is a frivolous lawsuit as far as the Roman law is concerned. So he chucks him out of court. But once again can you see the determination of people to stop the apostolic work even through the courts.

And I think that's a pattern that continues right to this day but of course wonderfully the opposite is true too. And here's the third thing Acts points out to us the shape of gospel ministry it provokes an opposing response but can you also see it leads to a welcoming response too.

[11:41] It's most notable I think verse 8 let me read that to you again. Do you remember the Jews had gone Peter had gone to the Paul had gone to the synagogue to speak to the Jews what had the Jews done?

They kicked him out of the synagogue. Verse 8 Crispus the ruler of the synagogue believed in the Lord together with his entire household and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed or baptized even though Paul had turned his back on the Jews who'd opposed him verse 6 it isn't the whole story because the synagogue leader becomes a Christian and his household.

I can imagine that Paul this cat Crispus would have been in this category of people that Paul would have been forgiven for thinking they'll never become a Christian that they'll never become a Christian they're so unlikely to turn to Jesus Christ the very leader of the synagogue where Paul is kicked out of as if he would ever become a Christian but here he is listening to God's word as one who believed he and all his household we used to do some of us men we'd meet with people from the mosque and the imam at the mosque for meetings about better understanding one of us would speak on a topic and the imam would speak and we'd have a bit of a discussion they weren't particularly profitable but the one person who I thought would not be converted is the imam and yet here we see in a similar context they're so angry these Jews and yet the ruler of the synagogue is converted verse 8 tells us there were many others that believed with him also

I think you see the same response in Apollos' ministry Apollos is already a Christian he comes to Ephesus and he welcomes the correction of both Priscilla and Aquila they want to help him to learn more and he's humble enough to receive it so can you see chapter 18 is reminding us what we see repeatedly in the book of Acts that the gospel of Jesus always divides people there are those who are hostile to its message and messengers and there are those who receive and accept it and there are other kinds of responses as well but the accumulative effect of us working through Acts on me has been that we should always expect these two things some opposing some welcoming so the fourth thing that chapter 18 of Acts tells us about the shape of gospel ministry is alongside the apostolic work and threaded through the different responses of rejecting and accepting there's a divine work as well and so

God is working here and I want you to see the dimensions so look at verse 9 again because in verse 9 we see that God is at work there to encourage the people who are doing the apostolic work he appears to Paul in a vision and he urges him do not be afraid keep on speaking as a result Paul stays in Corinth for about a year and a half that's quite a long time for him but it's very important for you and I to see what Jesus goes on to say in verse 10 in this vision let me read it to you I'll read from verse 9 the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision do not be afraid go on speaking do not be silent for I am with you and no one will attack you or harm you for I have many in this city who are my people so first of all there's a promise of protection there isn't there and of course that isn't a promise that God makes to everyone we know don't we we pray for Christians who are suffering terribly all over the world because of their faithfulness to Jesus

[15:53] Paul went to other cities and he was attacked and he was harmed and he was beaten up we've seen that so it seems that here there's a special arrangement God made in order to prolong Paul's ministry in order to prolong it but can you see the other part of the encouragement that Jesus gives in verse 10 he tells him that he has many people in this city that's an interesting phrase isn't it I don't think that Jesus is talking about people who've already become Christians no I think what

he's doing there is he's encouraging Paul to keep speaking the gospel because Jesus has more people in Corinth who are going to respond positively to the gospel he's speaking about that group of people that the Bible elsewhere calls the elect the chosen those who are chosen by God to respond to the gospel with faith so do you remember

Jesus said in John 10 and I have other sheep that are not of this fold and I must bring them in also and they will listen to my voice so there will be one flock one shepherd and I think here in act 6 Jesus is reminding Paul that behind every conversion is divine election Jesus the good shepherd has his sheep those who will welcome the gospel when Paul shares it those whom God has chosen and called so the divine work here is the setting of side of people for faith for salvation and so Paul is encouraged keep sharing the gospel keep telling others because there are those in Corinth whom God has chosen to be saved who have not yet responded it's an amazing encouragement to say Paul you're not on a fool's errand it's not up to you there are those whom

God has chosen you go and preach the gospel and there will be people that respond there's one other reminder of God's sovereignty in the apostolic work it's in verse 27 and I'm just going to read it to you can you hear it it's at the end Apollos it's a really simple thing when he arrived what did he do he greatly helped those who through grace had believed let me just spend a little bit of time on that verse for a moment Apollos greatly helped those who through grace had believed how did the people in Achaia come to believe the gospel from that verse can you see it so there are two answers on that the first answer is this Apollos helped them how did Apollos help them well presumably he did so by speaking the gospel of Jesus refuting false ideas reasoning with them persuading them to trust in

Jesus how did the people in Achaia become Christians Apollos helped them what's the second reason they believed the gospel because of God's grace God's grace do you see that there it says doesn't it by grace they had believed and the same could be said for anyone who's believed the gospel how did Paul Levy first come to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ there's two answers to that the first answer is that people like Alan and Mary people like Hugh and Brian helped me my parents Alan and Mary taught and modeled the gospel to me Hugh and Brian taught me in Sunday school and prayed for me that I would learn about God and so that's the first answer it was people like Alan and Mary and Hugh and Brian but there's a second answer isn't it the grace of God is the second answer God made sure I heard the gospel God opened my mind so I could see the truth of it God granted me strength to turn away from my sins and stop living for myself God helped me to trust in him and he did all of that though I don't deserve any of it and if you are a Christian here this morning if you are somebody who's trusted in the Lord Jesus your story is the same as mine how did you come to believe the gospel there's two answers one a person or some people helped you and secondly the grace of God was at work in you a divine work you might not be like me at all you might really like surprises and that is fine the Bible thankfully wasn't written for people with personalities like mine not all of it anyway you might really like surprises whether you like to have really clear expectations or you're happy to roll with whatever life throws at you [21 : 27] God thinks that it is good for us to know something in advance so whether you like to have a really clear expectation or whether you're happy to roll with whatever life throws at you God thinks it is good for you to know some things in advance!

and one of those things that God wants you to know this morning is when you speak the gospel that you will know what is coming it's important isn't it when there are opposing responses that you know what's coming already it's a great help when people oppose the gospel that we are not taken by surprise and God is not taken by surprise and it shouldn't surprise us either the New Testament tells you and I that persecution is normal and people being hostile to Christianity is normal and people speaking out about Christian belief is not new it is not unique in our moment in history and we should expect it and in fact knowing we should expect it should be a great help to us it means that when persecution comes to this church and it comes to you mustn't think the wheels are falling off having clear expectations assists us but

I want to stress this this morning having clear expectations can grow inside of us what we might call expectancy expectations are things that you possess expectancy is something that you feel expectancy is the anticipation of something good happening and those who are expecting babies you are expectant those who are engaged you are looking forward in expectancy it's the anticipation of something good happening and it seems to me that the book of Acts has been designed and has been written to prepare us for the hard moments in speaking the gospel but also

to stir up expectancy because when the gospel is spoken people don't just respond with opposition some respond with a welcome and not only that but God is working in Acts to remind us that God's grace comes to people to help them believe and God has people whom he's chosen and who he will call but who aren't yet believers God has people like that and so let me ask you and those of us who are regulars here let me ask you do you believe that do you really believe that and if so are you expecting to see God at work is your heart expected I have to admit that my heart is often something else sometimes my heart is impatient sometimes my heart is pessimistic sometimes when I think about God's work in the world particularly in the UK I'm sceptical and it's very easy it seems to me to look all around at the opposition to the gospel and see that we're surrounded by not just hostility but widespread apathy the apathy is worse than the hostility and find it really disheartening and if you're anything like me you find that it's very easy to see your own failures in sharing the gospel

I seem to be a master at missing opportunities and I don't pray as earnestly for people as I wish I did and I sometimes frankly don't care about people being lost in the way that I should I also find it really easy just to see how people happy people seem to be living without Jesus when I think about the neighbours that live on my street whom I know my friends who don't believe their lives in many cases don't appear on the surface to be all that broken and I find it hard to believe that actually they need Jesus more than anything else and for me it's easier to see all of those things so much that I'm prone to forget what God tells me in his word I'm prone to seeing all those things that I've just described more clearly than what the Bible teaches me about God's work and of course the evidence that exists for what

[26 : 43] God tells me is all around us in the world people are becoming Christians and people are welcoming the message of Jesus and God has not packed up and gone home he is still graciously at work in our world in his sovereign purpose choosing people to belong to him and he has many people in our city too presumably he has people in Ealing in Hanwell in Greenfoot in Northolt presumably he has people in your school and at your workplace in your family amongst your neighbours and friends he has people who don't yet believe but one day will as it were they are waiting for someone to come and share the gospel with them and that is a tremendous encouragement isn't it and I need to keep reminding myself of that that God might grow expectancy in my heart and maybe you need that as well that you and I as the church here in IPC in Ealing we have a continuing part to play in the apostolic work we are not apostles of course but the apostolic gospel has been passed down to us and it hasn't changed and Jesus is still the Messiah he is still the king that they proclaimed now then that we proclaim now he is the king who died for his people the king who came back to life to rule forever and one day he will come back to judge and between now and that day the work of God the divine work continues and God continues to use people to help others see him and turn to him and he uses people like you and people like me and we ought to expect that he will we ought to expect him to do his work around us in the people we know and we ought to repent of our pessimism and our doubt

I need to and we ought to keep coming back to the pages of the Bible so that our hearts would be stirred again stirred to expectancy by his sovereign power and his irresistible grace verse 8 christmas christmas christmas christmas to his friends the ruler of the synagogue believed in the lord and 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 why do you need to be told to go on speaking and do not be silent because what's the temptation the temptation is to stop speaking and to be silent jesus says 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 let's pray