

The Apostle Paul Was Afraid and Weak

1 Cor. 2:1-5

I made this statement in a chapel talk in college and I thought I might be in trouble with the Professors. One came to me after and said they were worried about where I might be going with this but as soon as I quoted the scripture, he was ok. Truth is, Paul himself said he was weak – fearful – and trembled. 1 Cor. 2:3

We do not normally align Paul with fear or with weakness. We think of him with almost super hero status – at least to Christians. Paul was a gospel preacher that preached boldly and did make a lot of enemies because of his preaching and teaching. We normally think of Paul with terms like determination or strength. But in the Bible even the weaknesses of men are illuminated. Nothing is hidden even though Paul might have wanted it so.

Before his conversion, Paul was a well-known Hebrew who was in the upper echelons of Judaism. At that stage of his life he could have had a great career as a Pharisee and probably could have made lots of money and had lot of prestige. He wielded so much influence that he was given letters from the Sanhedrin to go out and round up Christians – which was technically against Roman law. The High Priest even signed these orders. That could have been a death sentence for him had this got back to Rome. Paul was not a lightweight – he was **SOMEBODY** in Judaism. Paul was both Jew and Roman which made him unique amongst his few peers. The Council Sanhedrin would have sought Paul out to help keep them looking good. I doubt that Paul had ever thought he'd be anything but on the Sanhedrin at a very high rank. Paul figured that his pedigree would put him to be amongst the most important Jews of his generation. He gives his pedigree himself in Phil. 3:4-6: *“If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”*

Paul saw himself as a Jew that was heads above the average Jew even those in the highest levels.

Paul Life – Prior To Arriving in Corinth

Paul is converted in Acts 9 and after his conversion we see he does some preaching and teaching. After that, we have nothing revealed about Paul till chapter 13. Acts 9 is believed to have been written around 34 AD and Acts 13 is written around 48 AD. That is 14 years about which we know nothing of Paul. Those activities are known only to a few who may have traveled with Paul and of course these things were known to God.

Paul's Missionary Journeys In The Book Of Acts

1st Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14): Answering God's call to proclaim Christ, Paul and Barnabas left the church at Antioch in Syria. At first, their method of evangelism was to preach in the town synagogues. But when many of the Jews rejected Christ, the missionaries recognized God's call of preaching to the Gentiles. This preaching got Paul severely persecuted and run out of each town and stoned and left for dead at Lystra – Acts 14:19-20.

Because of his bold testimony, Saul the persecutor became Paul the persecuted. Those who rejected his message of salvation through Jesus tried to stop and harm him. In Lystra, he was stoned and left for dead. But God spared him. Through trials and beatings and imprisonments, he kept on preaching Christ. Paul's ministry to Gentiles brought controversy over who could be saved and how to be saved.

Between his first and second missionary journeys, he participated in a conference in Jerusalem discussing the way of salvation. The final consensus was that the Gentiles could receive Jesus without submitting to Jewish traditions.

Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey – beginning Acts 15:36ff

Macedonian call – Acts 16:9-10 *“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, come over to Macedonia and help us.”*

And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Philippi – beaten and imprisoned – 1 Thess 2:1-2 *“For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ‘But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.’”*

-Thessalonica – problems caused by Jews – Acts 17:10, 13-15

-Berea – problems caused by Thessalonian Jews – Acts 17:16-18

-Athens – sees the entire city dedicated to idolatry

In Acts 18 Paul arrives at Corinth to preach the good news. Once again, he received opposition from the Jews – Acts 18:5-9, 11.

Paul by his own description is not eloquent in speech. Now, contrast this to Apollos and to the speakers/orators of Greek society. So, here is Paul in the midst of one of the major cities of Greek society and the Roman Empire. There was nothing impressive about the physical appearance of Paul (2 Cor 10:10). *“For they say, his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”*

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know 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 in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 1 Cor 2:1-5

“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.” Acts 18:9-10.

Paul is not the type to hold anything back and this led to opposition wherever he preached. Paul had plenty of afflictions, most brought on by his preaching. After departing from Corinth, Paul's difficulties continued. - His time at Corinth certainly was not easy – *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know 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 in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.* 1 Cor 4:9-13;

Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey Key location: Ephesus (Acts 19:10; 20:31)

Acts 19:20 tells us that the gospel was causing growth and the word was getting stronger. Despite this growth and strength, there were many challenges according to Acts 20:23-30 *“except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”*

Applications for Us

Through of all of the difficulties, Paul pressed on. Yet, let us not make the mistake in thinking it was easy for him.

There were several times Paul received encouragement from the Lord – Acts 18:9-10 (Corinth); Acts 18:9-10 *“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.”*

Acts 23:11 (Roman tribune); *“The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”*

Acts 27:23-25 journey to Rome; *“For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.”*

2 Tim 4:17 -Paul was able to endure because he kept his sights on Christ – He appreciated Jesus’ sacrifice – felt indebted to serve others – and longed for the resurrection.

Gal 6:9-10 *“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*

Phil 3:13b-14 *“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

The life of a Christian is certainly not all roses. But, don’t let the challenges cause you to stop growing in your faith and serving the Lord. There will be disappointments and discouragements. But there will also be nice surprises along the way and many encouragements. So, don’t grow weary in well doing. Don’t lose heart. Do the best you can and press on.

Invitation