



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 18:1-17

Acts

"Visiting Vanity Fair"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in the book of Acts and we are in chapter 18 this morning. We're going to look at verses 1-17. The apostle Paul is on his second missionary journey. He is traveling the length of Greece. He has been in Macedonia, started out in Philippi and traveled south to Thessalonica, then to Berea, and each time he's forced to leave. He went to Athens from Berea. We studied that last week. He preached on Mars Hill and some response - not much, but some of the people there, the philosophers who did respond and believed.

Paul has now moved on and we read in chapter 18, "After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

"But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.' Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the

synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.' And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

"But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, saying, 'This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.' But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I'm unwilling to be a judge of these matters.' And he drove them away from the judgment seat. And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the time we have to come together and to read the scriptures and consider their meaning in some depth. We pray, Lord, that as we do that, you'd bless us. So much for us to learn from this text, much about Your grace, and we pray that You would teach us about that. And much about how we as believers in Jesus Christ, how the church of Christ is to function in this world, and we pray that You would teach us about that and that You would equip us morning to go out from this place into the world and proclaim Your truth and live lives that match the witness that we give with our words.

The weather is hot, the skies are bright, and yet the spiritual reality is it is a cold, dark world in which we live. But we are Your

lights in this world. We are the body of Christ and we have a function in this world, and that is to proclaim Christ, be His witnesses in this generation and in this city, and You've given us a great task, but we have great encouragement from the texts that we read about doing just that.

And so teach us, Father, and encourage us, that we would be witnesses wherever we are, whether it be in the office or in the neighborhood or in the school. Young and old alike, Father, make us good, faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ. Bless us spiritually in this hour and bless us physically as well. We pray for the material needs of each and every one of us. We are dependent upon You for all of that, for every breath that we take.

As we were reminded last week in our text, we live and move and exist within You. You give us the breath that we take. Each breath we draw is a gift from You. That's Your kindness and Your grace to us. And Father, we look to You to bless us for everything, for the food we eat, the clothing we wear, the salaries we get. We look at what we have and we must confess we have been blessed abundantly. You are a generous God and we thank You that.

But we pray for those that are experiencing privation, whether it be in the material things of life and are people out of work. We pray for them, that You'd encourage them and provide employment. And we pray for those who are sick and those who are recovering from illnesses or from surgeries. We pray that You give them healing and encouragement in all of that. We pray for the grieving.

Thank You for Your grace. May we understand it better this morning as we study, and may we rejoice in it this evening when we come back to this place and take the Lord's supper and remember His death for us and remember that He who came that first time is coming a second time. And His coming may be near. May we live for that day. We pray these things in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] One of the questions that we face almost every day is how are we to live in the world? We live in a materialistic worldly age

with lots of advantages and lots of temptations. We know that we can't conform to the world. Should we then withdraw from it? People have done that, but of course we know that's not the solution. Should we try to change the world, become aggressive and attack its institutions? When Christians do that, the church just takes on the character of another special interest group, rather than the channel of grace that we are to be. It's really the mission that has been given to us. The church of Jesus Christ has a unique function. We are God's channel of grace in this world. We are to be Christ's witnesses in this world.

And in Acts 18 we have texts which gives us some help on how we are to do that, when Paul travels from Athens to Corinth, from the center of worldly wisdom to a center of worldly wealth and pleasure. His career there is an example to us. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city. It was a commercial city. It was a corrupt city, much like New York or Los Angeles or Dallas. Paul lived there for a year and a half. He worked there. He conversed with the Corinthians and he gives us a model for Christian conduct and service in the world today.

Corinth was located and is located about 50 miles west of Athens on a narrow isthmus, a narrow land bridge connecting the main part of Greece to the north with the Peloponnesus to the south. Its location was ideal for commerce. It had two harbors, one on either side of the isthmus, one on the Adriatic Sea, and the other on the Aegean. So ships traveling east and west could avoid the dangerous route south around the Peloponnesus and could instead travel along the safer route near the coastline and sail directly to Corinth, which became rich, transporting cargos across that isthmus. Ships were actually dragged across it from the Adriatic Sea to Aegean Sea, or vice versa. Sir William Ramsay described Corinth as having one foot planted in each sea.

As a result, it controlled the trade route between Rome and Asia and became a great commercial city, a city of worldly wealth. And along with its wealth, it became a city of worldly pride and pleasure. Corinth has been called the Vanity Fair of the Roman empire. It was

notorious for immorality of every kind - seaport cities are often like that and Corinth was no exception. In fact, it seems to have been an exception in its immorality. The city was dominated by Acrocorinth, which is a great rocky hill that stands nearly 2,000 feet about sea level. On top of it was the temple of Aphrodite, or Venus, the goddess of love.

At one time it was served by a thousand prostitutes who would roam the city streets at night. In fact, prostitutes in the ancient world were called Corinthian girls. And the city was so associated with immorality that the term "to act like a Corinthian," or "Corinthianize" became an expression for committing fornication. Corinth was a promiscuous city, Corinth was a pagan city with many temples and shrines to the pagan gods. The temple of Apollo still stands in the ruins of Corinth today.

So Paul came to this city of idols, this city of immorality and arrogance. He came without much money, without a commanding personality, without impressive credentials - at least without the kind of credentials that would have impressed the Corinthians. He came without powerful friends. At least, without powerful friends in that city. He came alone, and he would later write to the Corinthians that he came in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. As he approached that great cosmopolitan city, he realized his inadequacies and he must have wondered who is sufficient for these things? He came in humility. He came in complete dependence upon the Lord alone. He came with only the gospel. And as he wrote to those Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, he came determined to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He didn't come to that pagan city in order to pull down its temples or to close its bars and its brothels, not directly at least. He came to within souls. And there were many there to win, and a lot would be won, because as the Lord would tell Paul, "I have many people in this city."

So Paul came to Corinth to preach. He came to be a witness for Christ. He came weak. He came alone, but the Lord strengthened him

and the Lord gave him companions. Silas and Timothy were still up north in Macedonia, but Luke writes in verse 2 that after arriving in Corinth, he met "a Jew name Aquila, and his wife Priscilla." Aquila was from Pontus, a region on the southern rim of the black sea, but he moved to Rome, and while he was in Rome he met Priscilla and the two married. Usually her name is mentioned first, sometimes as Prisca, which is the name of one of the great families of Rome, and the fact that her name is mentioned first so often and is the same as that family has led some to suspect that she may have been related to it, and Aristocratic woman.

They were believers who had recently arrived from Rome because the emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from the city. According to the Roman historian Suetonius who wrote some years later that Claudius banished the Jews because they were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Crestus. Now we're left to wonder who Crestus was, but it is likely a reference to Christ. And it indicates that when Christianity entered the synagogues in that city, it caused a commotion in the Jewish community. There were disturbances. There were riots. And the result of that was the Jews were expelled from Rome. And as a result of that, Aquila and Priscilla came to Corinth. There was wealth there. There was a market for their trade, which was making tents, and so they arrived in Corinth and they set up shop.

Well, this is probably what brought Paul in contact with them, because he was a tentmaker. It was customary for rabbis to have a trade, and so Paul, being trained as a rabbi, had a father who also was that and would have trained his son in a particular trade - trained him tent making, just as Aquila's father evidently trained him, and this was how they supported themselves as missionaries.

The Lord has not designed us to live alone. Since arriving in Athens, Paul was alone. Paul had been ministering by himself. And one can do that for a time, but that's very difficult. And over a long period of time that is not good. We all need one another. We need mutual support and encouragement. We need others to bear one

another's burdens. We are a body. That's how the church is described. And we relate together. We function together.

And so Paul needed companionship, and in God's providence, He brought these three people together in Corinth and they were an encouragement and a help to one another. In fact, in the last chapter of the book of Romans, Paul calls attention to Priscilla and Aquila. He speaks of them as his fellow workers in Jesus Christ. He sends greetings to Rome from them, and then he said that they had risked their lives for him. So they had a close communion, a close fellowship and were beneficial very much to one another. Well, Paul stayed with them, lived with them, and they became business partners and fellow missionaries. They evidently worked together in the mornings and in the afternoons, and then they studied and ministered together afterwards in the evening. They were very busy there in Corinth.

And that's how we are to live in the world, to be busy with the responsibilities that we have been given. Paul would later write to the Thessalonians, the church that he had only recently left, and he gave them encouragement to do that He warned them not to be idle. There was that problem within the church, and so he wrote to them, and in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, he told them to lead a quiet life, to attend to their own business, and work with their hands.

We are to live like that in this world. We are to be productive in temporal matters. Whatever area of life God had called you to in business or in various professions, whatever they may be, we're to be active in that. We are to be diligent in that. That kind of life, a quiet, industrious life, is a witness. People see. People notice how we conduct our affairs. Are they orderly? Are they disciplined? Are they honest? It's a witness. And Paul, along with Aquila, was living a diligent kind of life in that way, attending to the material temporal affairs of life as a good steward. We're to live that way, but we're also to be spiritually active, and Paul was that. Paul would work hard during the week and then minister on the Sabbath in the synagogue.

Verse 4, "Reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks."

He would go into the synagogues as we've seen him do throughout our studies in the book of Acts and he would take the scrolls of the Old Testament and he would trace out the prophecies of the Messiah and explain how they were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, how He had been crucified for our sins. He's that lamb, that Lamb of God that we see all the way through the Old Testament, offered morning and evening at the tabernacle and at the temple on the great feast days, that lamb or that bull or that goat. It all looked forward to Jesus Christ and the offering that he would make on the cross, and that priesthood that they studied and they were so familiar with in Jerusalem. It's all a picture of him, and he'd go to Psalm 110 and say, "This is the priest, this priest according to the order of Melchizedek, this king priest, is Jesus Christ of the tribe of Judah."

And on he would go, reasoning through the Scriptures, explaining that He came to die and God raised Him from the dead just as Psalm prophesied, and in so doing confirmed that His sacrifice had been accepted. He had been justified on account of our justification.

Well, he did this for some time and after a few weeks he was joined by Silas and Timothy, who came down from Macedonia. And that was a great encouragement for the apostle Paul. We know from Paul's letters, 1 Thessalonians 3 and Philippians 4, that they brought two things with them. First of all, they brought good news about the church in Thessalonica. Now the believers there were steadfast in their faith and love. So Paul, who had to leave under duress, had been forced to leave that city and maybe he felt he was leaving a work prematurely, got good news that, no, those people are flourishing. The work of the ministry is going on. They're growing and developing. Good news from Thessalonica.

And they brought a gift of money from his friends in Philippi, the only church that shared financially in his ministry. Corinthians didn't. He worked with his hands there so that he wouldn't be a burden

on them. The Thessalonians did not support him. He worked with his hands there so that they would not be a burden to them there. But the church in Philippi, that small group of believers, were evidently an exception and he did accept their gifts and it was a significant gift, because it allowed him to stop making tents and devote himself completely to the ministry, which he did, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

Evidently, though, his ministry in the synagogue stirred up such opposition that Paul had to leave. I say evidently. That's certainly the case we read in verse 6. But he made his departure with a dramatic gesture. Like writes in verse 6 that he "shook out his garments," which was a way of saying that he was leaving the synagogue. At their request, he was leaving, but he was leaving so thoroughly that he was even leaving the dust of the synagogue behind him. It was a complete break, he was saying. And then he said, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I go to the Gentiles." They understood what he meant by that.

They knew that that was an illusion to Ezekiel 33, where the watchmen of the city is told that if he fails to warn the people of impending doom, of disaster that's coming, then the blame will be on his head. But if the watchmen warns the city and the people of the city do no respond, then the blood will be on their own head. So Paul makes that declaration to say, in effect, "I've given you the warning. I've told you the truth. I've told you of what is coming, of the judgment to come, and the way to escape through the one door into life, through the one person, the Lord Jesus Christ," and they rejected that.

So Paul went out and grieved that his kinsmen according to the flesh had refused life, but he was relieved that he could leave without guilt. It is important that we be able to do that. We're watchmen and we must give the warning to those about us, those that work, those in our family. We must be clear about the gospel, that guilt would not be on our heads. So Paul could leave with a clear conscience, knowing

that he had given the truth. He'd been the watchman. He had given light to his people.

I'm sure the Jews were glad to see Paul go. I'm sure they were mad when they saw where he went, which is next door, to the house of a man named Titius Jusus. Well, the interesting things that we see in this text alone, but we see it throughout the book of Acts, is the providence of God, how He works things so perfectly for His people, for His apostles. We see that with Paul. He comes to Corinth alone. And Paul was a man like you and I, made of the stuff as us, and no doubt he was lonely and he was sensing the isolation, the loneliness of that situation, and soon he meets these two people who become his close friends, Priscilla and Aquila. Providentially they're brought together. And we see the same providential work here. He preaches in the synagogue, and not many people come to faith to begin with, but this man does, this person in the synagogue, Titius Justus, and so he leaves, and it just so happens that this man has a home right next door to the synagogue. So he goes across the street and he preaches, and though he's not in the synagogue, he's shaken the dust from his garment, they can still hear him preaching and he's still exercising an influence on those people. God's providence is at work all the time.

Titius Justus was a God-fearing Gentile who had been converted through Paul's preaching there in the synagogue and he made his house available to Paul's ministry. So that was a significant conversion, but then other conversion also was quite significant. Crispus came to faith, believed. He's described in verse 8 as the leader of the synagogue. It's evidently the synagogue not only lost this man Titius Justus, but it lost its chief rabbi. He and his whole household believed in the Lord, along with many of the Corinthians, and they were baptized.

So Paul left the synagogue, but he didn't leave it alone. His preaching had been effective, and there again is a great theme of the book of Acts: the effective of the word of God. We're not sent out into the world to find new techniques of reaching people, of seeking to do

it with clever words. Paul didn't come to Corinth with the wisdom of the world. He didn't come with clever speech. He came with the word of God. That's what he was armed with and that's all we need in order to be effective, to preach the word of God. And as we've seen so often, the Lord's promise in Isaiah 55:11 comes true, that His word does not go out and return empty, and it did not when Paul was ministering there in the synagogue. He saw success, the initial success in his preaching there, but he had been scorned in the synagogue and he was aware of a very distinct pattern in his ministry. He would enter the synagogue, he would preach, there would be converts, and then there would be opposition. Paul would be beaten and he'd be driven from town.

And so Paul became concerned that that would happen in Corinth. He was evidently feeling discouraged and wondering if he would soon be forced to leave and wondering if he would be roughed up. So one night the Lord graciously appeared to him in a vision and encouraged him not to be afraid, but to continue on preaching. "Do not be silent," He said in verse 9, "for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." I am with you. What an encouragement that was.

Paul wasn't alone. Now, he knew that, of course. Paul was very much aware of Christ's presence with him, but Christ reminded him of truths of which he needed reminding. We all need to be reminded of the truths that we know. We need to be reminded often of the great promises of God, because we can neglect them so often.

I don't know that Paul had neglected that promise, but Paul is reminded of it. This is a great promise of God. The Christian enjoys and unseen companionship. Christ is with us. We are never alone in this world. Paul wasn't alone in that hostile city. Christ was with him there, just as He had been with him on Mars Hill, just as He had been with him wherever he had been, and just as He would be with him wherever he would go.

Spurgeon once said, "As sure as God ever puts His children in the furnace, He will be in the furnace with them." The Lord reminded the apostle of that great truth, and He reminded him of that truth in the night. Nighttime is the most solitary time of the day. It is when we are alone. It's when we're alone with our thoughts, and that can be good, because that's a time to reflect, it's a time to meditate, it's a time to look back on the day, and sometimes we look back on our lives. And sometimes it's not so good, because then in those lonely hours we can begin to reflect, and fear can begin to cloud our minds.

Well, that was the time that the Lord chose to reassure Paul that things were okay. In the darkest hour, He was with him. Samuel Rutherford, the great 17th century Scottish divine once wrote a friend from prison, "Jesus Christ came into my cell last night and every stone flashed like a ruby." Well, maybe He did. I know this for sure, that Jesus Christ was with Samuel Rutherford in that prison. He is with us in the furnace. He is with us in the cell. He is with us in the night, because He is alive. That is what undergirds this whole vision, this whole experience, this whole visitation that Paul had. He was visited by the Lord Jesus Christ because the Lord Jesus Christ is alive. He's a resurrected Savior. We don't worship a dead martyr. We worship and serve a living Savior who Himself experienced the very darkest of nights. And He is with us to encourage us, that He has experienced it all. He's experienced every kind of evil that we can experience, and He has triumphed over it all.

And to encourage us that He is our constant companion in Him, we are more than conquerors. He encouraged Paul with that. And so you remember that when life gets tough and lonely, when you are fatigued and worn down from work or from trials, when life seems darkest. When it's night, Christ is with you. He reassured Paul of that and promised him that no man would be allowed to attack him. No man would be allowed to do harm to him. Paul had suffered a number of attacks. He had experienced stonings. He'd experienced beatings. But the Lord promised to build a hedge around him there in Corinth.

He had a great work for him to do, and so Paul was to go forward without fear. He was to do that because the Lord promised, "I have many people in this city." What people is that?

It's not the people that had already believed. It is those who would yet believe. That is the reason it was so important for Paul to go on speaking and not be silent. Go on speaking, because there are more people that will believe. Preaching, teaching, speaking is God's means of bringing His people to Himself. Romans 10:17, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." God knows the future because God has planned the future. And He knew who would believe, because He had chosen them for Himself from all eternity, from the foundation of the world.

But Christ was assuring Paul of was that he would have a successful and fruitful ministry in Corinth and he would have that successful and fruitful ministry as he preached, and it would be successful and fruitful because He had His elect ones in that dark and sinful place. They were still in darkness to look. In that city you could not see them. They were not apparent at that time when He gave this great encouragement to people. Some were still in the synagogue. Some were merchants and craftsmen there in the market place, along with their wives and their children. Some were worshipping at the temples of Apollo and Neptune. Some were those girls walking the streets at night, slaves of degrading sins, but they were God's elect. They were in that city.

Those whom God had chosen, whom Christ had purchased on the cross, He had paid their sins, and they would be brought out of darkness into light when the gospel was preached. Paul wrote of them in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. He wrote of fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, and thieves, and said, "Such were some of you; but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified." Those are the kinds of people God has elected out of every age. He has chosen sinners to be saints, and having saved them, He changes them. He writes, "Such were some of you." That's a significant statement. That

says a great deal about the people in Corinth. It says a great deal about the Christian. You were like that. You no longer are. You are different people, having come to Christ, having been brought to He, having been placed in Christ, you are not the people you used to be. You are new creatures in Jesus Christ. All things have passed away.

Now that is the great work that Christ had for Paul in Corinth. He would make him a great soul winner through the preaching of the gospel, and that would have an effect upon the city. It would have an effect upon the brothels and the temples of Corinth. That's how the church has an influence in this world. It is a quiet influence. It is a deliberate, steady influence. It is an influence that comes by being a witness to the truth, a witness to Jesus Christ, a channel of His grace. People are changed on the inside, and when they are changed on the inside, it has an outward manifestation and it affects those around them in the institutions of this world.

I'm not suggesting that there's no place for Christians to speak out against the vice of this age and the various institutions that are corrupt and evil and to take a stand against that. I'm not saying that at all. The church has a distinguished history of people doing that, of opposing slavery and other institutions such as that and having an influence for change for good. But fundamentally the way that the church has this dramatic, significant effect on society is through the preaching of the gospel, the changing of lives, and the changing of that character personally affects society in general. And that's what Paul was doing. He didn't go there to make Corinth moral. He didn't go there to change the society of that place. He went to win souls.

And isn't it striking the kind of incentive that was given to him to continue doing that, to continue preaching. The very thing that God used to encourage him to evangelize is the doctrine of election. That's not a disincentive to evangelism. It is an incentive. Christ spoke to Paul of His elect, His many people in this city, and it should be an encouragement to us. It is the elect who are saved. But they are saved through faith. God chooses His people. He has chosen them from the

foundation of the world to believe, to salvation through faith, and so they must hear the gospel to believe. And we must give it. We don't know who they are. We don't know who God's elect are out in the world around us, out in the city. They may be people at work with us. It may be someone sitting right next to you this morning.

We don't know who they are. We proclaim the gospel to those around us with a confidence that the elect will believe. That's the assurance that Paul has. Our efforts will succeed. Christ will not lose one of His sheep. They will hear His voice and they will come. And we have that assurance, we ourselves, that He has many people in this city, in Dallas. So we should approach the day like that, with that confidence, that He has his elect here in this place and Christ will bring them through our witness, and we're to go out and we're to teach the gospel, preach the gospel, give it to those around us.

Well, that was His encouragement to the apostle Paul, and Paul was encouraged by the Lord's visit to him in the night. It turned his night into day, and he did just what the Lord told him. We read in verse 11 that "he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." As people believe the gospel, they came under His instruction, His ministry in the word of God. He taught the whole counsel of God to them there in Corinth, just as he would do in Ephesians when he remained there. And as Paul taught them, they were sanctified. They were changed. They were made more and more like Christ.

This is what the church is to be doing in the world. This is our mission. We are to be a speaking, teaching, living people. We are to be a people that proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ, and those who receive it, those who are quickened and brought to the faith are to be instructed in the faith, built up in the faith. And people are to know what we believe by what we say, and they are to see it in the consistent lives that we live.

Well, Paul did that for a year and a half, and just as the Lord promised, no harm came to him. But the Lord's promise that he would

not be harmed did not mean that attempts to harm him would not be made, and sometime during his ministry the Jews plotted an assault on him. It was difficult for them to see so many people believe in the gospel - people coming out of the synagogue. They didn't like that. They saw these Gentiles around the synagogue that they weren't having any influence coming upon coming to Jesus Christ, and so we read in verses 12 and 13 that they took their case against Paul and his preaching to the Roman governor and complained that he was prorogating an illegal religion. It was a well-planned scheme, because the verdict of a Roman governor would not only affect the immediate region there in Corinth or Achaia, but it would set a precedent for other governors and regions of the empire.

So if the governor ruled against Paul, Christianity would be considered illegal, and it could be prosecuted and persecuted by the Roman empire. That was certainly the hope of Paul's opponents. And the governor, or proconsul of Achaia, was Gallio. He was the younger brother of a very famous Roman, Seneca, the Stoic philosopher and instructor or tutor of Nero. So Gallio had important connections in Rome. He was a man with great personal charm. Seneca said of his brother, "No mortal is so pleasant to any one person as Gallio is to everybody."

And so the Jews brought Paul to the judgment seat, which is a large stone platform that stood in the market place, and there before Gallio they stated their case. Verse 13, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." Now, Judaism enjoyed the status of being a legal religion throughout the empire, and that meant that they were protected. They could meet without fear of reprisal. They were protected by the authorities and the accusers of people were arguing that he's teaching something contrary to Judaism and it should not be considered a legal religion. It's illegal.

Now, the Lord had promised Paul that he wouldn't be harmed and Paul witnessed the Lord's faithfulness there at the judgment seat. Just as he was about to open his mouth and make a defense, Gallio

spoke and put an end to the proceedings. He told them that if it were a recognizable crime that they had brought before him, it would be reasonable for him to rule on it, but, he said, "If there are questions about words and name and your own law, look after it yourselves; I'm unwilling to be a judge of these matters."

And so he dismissed the complaint as a petty religious squabble that had nothing to do with Roman rule in matters of state, and he drove them away from the judgment seat. Now that is a typical response of a man of the world. This was an important man. This was a significant leader in Corinth. He was a man of great power and authority, and I suspect if there's one man who was significant and important in that city, it was Gallio. And what's his response, to really the gospel, the issue of eternal life, the issue of man's relationship to God. He looks at it and he says, "This is insignificant. This has no bearing on anything of importance," and he dismisses it as just that, turns away. It was boring to him, not worthy of his time. That is so much the way of the world and how it responds to what is important, to spiritual things. And yet, in all of that again, we see the providence of God. It was at work in this man's thinking, in his disposition towards the things of God. Because by throwing the case out of court, Christianity was in effect ruled legal by default. And the Christians would not be troubled, would not be bothered, as long as they didn't violate civil law. Now, that ended about 10 or 12 later when Nero began to persecute Christians. But for the immediate future, the gospel would be preached and the church would be established. It would flourish in Corinth in that region and in other areas of the empire as well.

Now, as the trial broke up, and incident occurred which shows how prone the Gentiles were toward anti-Jewish feelings. Taking advantage of Gallio's rejection of the Jews' case, a crowd grabbed Sosthenes, who was the new leader of the synagogue, and probably Paul's prosecutor, and they beat him in front of the judgment seat. "But Gallio," Luke writes, "was not concerned about any of these

things." So the man whom Seneca called so pleasure was really a callous man. He was a true Stoic, less interested in real justice than he was in the business of Rome.

Well, what a contrast he is to the judge of all the earth, to Jesus Christ, who never turns a blind eye to cruelty of any kind, to sin of any kind. And judgment seat in Corinth where this event occurred has been excavated. In fact, I stood on it years ago and this morning I got the picture out and I looked at it and there I am, standing on the judgment seat, looking just like Gallio with my blue jeans and T-shirt and Acrocorinth in the background. But on the front of that great stone pedestal or judgment seat is the plaque, and on it has the Greek word, "**bama**," and transliterated into English, "bema." And what that means is "judgment seat." This is the word that Paul uses, a word that Luke uses here, the word that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5:10, where he writes, "We must all appear before the judgment seat, before the bema of Christ." And as I have thought about that over they years, I've wondered if perhaps Paul, when he wrote that, his mind didn't reflect back on this incident there in Corinth, there before the judgment seat of Gallio standing indifferent to the beating of Sosthenes, indifferent to real justice, and thought of Christ on the bema seat and the full attention that He will give to us. Nothing will be a matter of indifference to Him.

And someday we will all appear before Him, not to determine salvation. That is settled at the moment of faith and that is settled for all eternity. This judgment is to distribute rewards. Paul writes that each one may be recompense for his deeds in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad. So how do we live in this world? Well, we live as those who will stand before Christ and give an account for what we have done in this world, good and bad; how we have undertaken the responsibilities that had been given to us, how we have used the life that God has given to us - the obedience and the disobedience, the sins of omission, the sins of commission, not just

what we did, but what we didn't do, where we failed to be when we should have been there.

All of these things, all that we do, all that we said, all of it will come under review under the eye of Jesus Christ. He's indifferent towards anything - who scrutinizes everything. So how we are to live in this world? Well, we're to live as men and women who will give an account to the Master, to the Lord, as to how we lived every moment of our lives.

We really have a very short time in this world. We are pilgrims passing through, but while we are here, our words and our behavior ought to be a witness to Christ, a testimony to His grace. That's how Paul lived in Corinth, the Vanity Fair of the ancient world, and a city very much like our own.

A few weeks ago I mentioned that part of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, where the two pilgrims pass through Vanity Fair and how they were arrested and they were abused. In the story, they stand trial before the judge at the fair and Faithful, Christian's companion, is killed by the men of the fair. Christian is later released. And as he was leaving, he was joined by another person, a new pilgrim named Hopeful, who had witnessed Christian and Faithful's words and behavior, and he decided to join him on the road to the heavenly city. As he did, he told Christian that there were many more of the men of the fair that would follow after.

That is the way we are to live in this city and in this world - in such a way that the men of the fair will be drawn after us, be drawn to Jesus Christ. That's our responsibility. That's our calling, all of our callings. So may God help us to be pilgrims of the witness, in the world, but not of the world, not stained by the world, but lights in the midst of a dark and an evil place.

If you're here without Christ, I invite you to come after Him, to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior. He is God's eternal Son, He is God who became man, who was crucified and resurrected. He died for our sins and God raised Him from the dead to demonstrate that He

accepted His sacrifice. The gospel is very simple. The gospel is simply this: You are a sinner. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. That's true of all of us. Not one of us is better than the other. We're equally fallen. We're equally dead. We're equally guilty. And so we must begin by the realization that we are sinners and that we are in need of a Savior and the only Savior and the only salvation that there is that in Jesus Christ. He is the Savior of the world.

And so I urge you, look to Him. Trust in Him. Turn to Him. The moment that you do, you will be saved. The moment that you believe, you'll be forgiven of all of your sins, and at the moment, adopted into God's family, never to be removed from it. May God help you to do that. May God help you to believe and help all of us who have to know that we are witnesses, we have a place and a function in this world. We're to be channels of God's grace and may we be that faithfully. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace, and we are reminded of that in this text, in the comforting words that the Lord gave to Paul in the night, that He is with him and He's with us. Those words apply to us every bit as much as they did to Paul and there are many people in this city and that means that if we go out and preach the gospel, we give it in the everyday speech that we have with our friends and our neighbors that there will be a response, that Your people will be called through that giving of the gospel, so may we be faithful in that.

May we bold. We suffer the same things that evidently Paul suffered for that moment, the fear that comes upon us. And we pray that You would relieve us of that and make us bold and useful for You. We pray these things in Christ name. Amen.