

When I first read today's reading, my first reaction was "What on earth am I going to preach on, to give you guys something new?" After all, it seemed to be a very similar pattern to what happened in just about every **other** town that Paul preached in:

- He arrives in a new place,
- He goes and preaches to the Jews first
- Most of them reject him,
- so he then directs his efforts towards the Gentiles,
- he then faces some opposition,
- and then he moves on...

So, it was a very **similar** pattern in Corinth, to any other place, **except** for the fact that the **attempted** attack against Paul and Christianity, was thwarted... "When is an attack not an attack?" And the answer is, "When that attack has no traction – it's just dead in the water..."

And I guess what I realised, is Paul's time in Corinth, was the Lord's way of strengthening and encouraging him. Paul had been run out of so many towns, and at the last place (Athens), the educated elite had mocked him.... And he needed a bit of a break – not a break from preaching the Gospel – but a break from the constant rejection and persecution that he'd been enduring in just about every place he'd been.

So, let's set the scene:

Corinth was a **massive** city. It was the third largest city, in the whole Roman empire. With a population of around about 200 000ⁱ people, the only places that were any bigger, were Rome (itself), and Alexandria (in Northern Egypt). So, Corinth was

huge, and it was also an extremely immoral city – *it was the centre for the worship of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and its temple had 1000 sacred prostitutes*ⁱⁱ.

So, you'd think that **what Paul preached** in such a situation, might be pretty prominent in the reading, but it's not... The key to the reading, is verses 9 & 10: **9 And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 10 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."**

Why do you think Jesus said that to Paul? You know, when God says "Do not be afraid", He usually says it, because you **are** afraid (and we need reassuring)...

And when Paul came to Corinth, he **was** afraid. We know this, because when Paul later wrote to that church in Corinth, he said to them, "When I came to you.... ^{1 Corinthians 2:3} **I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling...**

I don't know about you, but when I think of Paul, I picture this man of **no** fear – a man of **no** weaknesses – a man who would just stand up and preach the gospel of Christ, and blow the consequences. I picture a man who, when he gets thrown out of one city, heads to the next one – unshaken,, unscathed,, full of confidence,, and none of it affecting him...

But Paul was **not** super-human. And I believe Paul's time in Corinth, was God's time of restoring him.

1. Firstly, he met up with Aquila and Priscilla, who shared the same trade as Paul – they were tent-makers. And it appears that they were **already** Christians – people who had been run out of Rome, themselves. And so Paul teams up with them, and they become partners in ministry... What an encouragement for someone who arrives in town, discouraged and alone.

And if you ever feel discouraged and alone, pray for other Christians who will become partners with you in ministry. And seek them out. **You** might be the answer to somebody else's prayer – someone who's feeling alone and discouraged, and needing someone to partner with in ministry.

2. Secondly, as the synagogue doors closed to Paul, another place opened up, right next door
3. Thirdly, although **most** of the Jews rejected the gospel, a very prominent Jew indeed – the synagogue ruler – and his whole family, believed... and
4. Fourthly, was the vision that the Lord gave him "**Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ 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.**"

What an encouragement.... And of course that word was proved to be true, when the Jews **did** bring him before the authorities, and the authorities found no fault in him. And so their attack had no traction, and it just failed.

So, this was a real time of encouragement for Paul, and he needed it, because he wasn't super-human.

I'm not super-human either... And neither are you... And the more times I read this passage, the more I found it resonating with me, and maybe you might find it resonates with you too...

OK, so he teams up with Aquila and his wife, Priscilla. And the first lesson for us today, is "Being a Christian, and engaging in Christian service (and evangelism) is extremely difficult, without the support of **other** Christians – people who will gather together **with** you, and pray for you, and strengthen you, and encourage you, as you obediently follow God. Any ministry, needs that kind of support base.

*When we first began Bush Disciples, God didn't give us any specific direction "about which towns to begin in", and so for the start, we tried to make a go-of-it, in all of the little towns and localities, where there was very little, or no Christian support... Well, after 6 months of that, it was obvious to see where God **was** at work, and we could also see the places where there was no response to the call of God at all.*

*We'd initially tried to stay **out** of the major centre of St George, because there was already a number of churches here. But it soon became obvious that St George was one of the places where God was growing the ministry... And if that's where God was at work, then maybe he wants us here for a reason...*

I gotta tell you though, when we first began regular services in St George, I personally copped a lot of flack from a few other

Christians who were very much against what we were doing... And I don't know why, but I hear some of those same comments getting thrown around again, recently. "Why is Bush Disciples meeting in St George? Wasn't the vision for it to just stay out in the little towns???"

Well, as I said, God didn't actually tell us where to start, and so we gave-it-a-go without a base-of-operations in town. But God had other ideas. And the Lord always knows better. And He knows how tough it is, to be in ministry, where there is very little support. And the Lord knew that the Bush Disciples church, needed a base of Christians, who would gather together, every week, and even more often, to strengthen and encourage one-another, and to worship together...

I need my Christian brothers and sisters to be partners with me in ministry, and you do too. We're in this together.

The second lesson, is about support for ministry (and in particular, financial support for ministry). Have you ever heard of the term, "a tent-making ministry"... No, it's not someone who makes tents to donate to natural disaster recovery... and in fact, most tent-making ministries have absolutely nothing to do with making tents.

The term, actually comes from today's reading: A tent-making ministry, refers to when somebody works (usually part-time in secular employment), to help fund and support themselves, in the ministry that God has called them to. And we get the term, because that's what **Paul** did – his trade was making tents. And when he first arrived in Corinth, that's what he did – He preached part time, and he made tents part time.

And that's pretty much the ministry that **I'm** involved in at the moment – I work a couple of days a week, to help support us in the ministry that God has **called** me to...

Now, here's something, that **I** wouldn't have noticed, except for the fact that for the last couple of years, I've been involved in a tent-making ministry myself: I suspect, that this time of making tents, for Paul, was **more** than just a financial necessity – it was part of the time-out that he needed.

I don't know if you realise it or not, but ministers – full-time preachers or evangelists – need a break sometimes.

When we first began Bush Disciples (I'm not going to try and hide it from you), it was a tough time. The Lord very clearly commanded us to leave a particular denomination (that had run amuck), and that break, resulted in a lot of friction and hurt with other people, and as I said before, we copped a fair bit of flack... And I actually found that for that time, a tent-making ministry – which for me meant manual work and machinery operation, was very therapeutic. It was something that I very much needed, to de-stress...

I had to do it, because financially – well, you try planting a new church (particularly out in the bush) without some very big financial backers... But in hind-sight, I can also see that this was God's way of giving me a break... And maybe it was God's way of giving Paul a break too. – to go back to working with his hands for a while.

And some people have the theory that “**All** ministries should be tent-making ministries”, because that's what Paul did. And

they reckon all ministers should work “a real job” to pay for their hobby of preaching... What these people fail to realise, is Paul’s **primary** call was to full-time preaching of the Gospel... Yes, there were small **periods** of tent-making ministry (when the need was there), but his **primary** call, was to full-time ministry...

The NIV says: ⁵ When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself **exclusively** to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. Alright, so when his mates turned up (Silas & Timothy), he stopped making tents, and began full time ministry.... How was he supported? Well, we find out in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 11:8 I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need.....

Alright, so when Timothy and Silas arrived from Macedonia, they brought with them, a gift to support Paul in his ministry, and so the tent-making finished, and Paul went **back** to full-time ministry.

In the last couple of months, I’ve actually been feeling that maybe it’s time for **me** to go back to full-time ministry – to reduce my secular work, so I can concentrate more on the ministry that God **called** me to. Looking back, I remember when I first candidated for ministry, I did it because I realised,

that what God was calling me to, had grown so much, that my secular job was getting in the way...

I suspect I've been a bit like Paul – I feel I **needed** a time of “tent-making”, but now I'm starting to feel it's interfering, with the ministry that God's called me to – maybe it's time to be devoted to that ministry, full time.

What do we need, for that to happen? Well, when Paul's mates turned up, they brought the financial support from other churches... I don't feel right about asking other churches to support Bush Disciples, unless we're pretty committed to it ourselves.

Please, I hope you never think of me as “that preacher who's always asking for money”. In some churches you'll get a message on tithing or giving, every single Sunday, just before the offering's taken up.... We never do that here. In fact, we don't even pass the plate around, to sort of suggest that anyone **should** be putting money in the offering... Ever since we began, we've just had a box, that sits on the Smoko table, and if you feel the Lord is calling you to support the ministry of Bush Disciples, you can put your offering into the box, or you do a direct debit to the Bush Disciples Bank Account....

Before we began Bush Disciples, someone said to me, “All we need, is 10 people tithing 10% of their gross income, and that'll support full-time ministry...” And that's true... But we're only about half way to supporting a full-time ministry at the moment. Some people are giving some **significant** regular support, and without that significant support, we couldn't do what we're doing (thank you). Others have made Bush Disciples a **portion** of their regular tithe... But we're only about half way to supporting full-time ministry.

As I said, “I rarely ask for donations”, but today I am putting it out there. I actually believe we all need to be challenged, with our giving... And we need to be challenged, “Is the ministry of Bush Disciples something you value?” Can you see that the need is greater than a part-time commitment? And I’m asking if you’d be willing to pray (and if you’re married, talk to your spouse), and to consider, as your offering to The Lord, giving regularly to the ministry of Bush Disciples...

Some of you, after you pray, might decide “No, we’re actually going to drop what we **are** give to Bush Disciples”, and that’s fine, but if you’re not a regular giver, I’d like to encourage you, to begin giving, sacrificially and regularly.

“Tithing” is an Old Testament principal. The New Testament principal is “to give as you are able”, but I’ve personally always found tithing {10% of gross income} as a very useful starting point. You **may** be able to give more than that, but I’ve always found, that when I make supporting Christian ministry a priority of my budget, I’ve **always** been able to give at **least** that... And you might be surprised how much the Lord blesses you, as you give yourself away.

So that’s the second point – supporting a full-time ministry. And I hope I haven’t scared anybody off, by putting that out there.

The third point I want to share from this reading, we’re actually going to talk about next week: Just verses 9 and 10:

"Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you....

And we're going to talk about what that means for us.
And a little heads up, I'd love it if some of you could have a bit of a think about what you could share, about the times fear was keeping you silent, but then you trusted in The Lord, and you realised that The Lord's with you, and He is your help and He is your strength...

ⁱ Fernando, A. The NIV Application Commentary – Acts. Zondervan: Grand Rapids. 1998. P.490

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