

A couple of weeks ago, we studied Acts 18:1-23, which included the two verses of today's reading, but today I just want us to focus on those 2 verses.

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he'd had a rough time, and he was afraid. We know this, because when he 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...

Acts 18:9–10 (ESV)

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."

Isn't it amazing – God knows, hey... The Lord knew, that Paul was afraid, and so He spoke to him: to calm his fears, and to build his strength, and to encourage him in his purpose. And the Lord knows when we're afraid. And the Lord speaks to us, when we're afraid:

So, when the Lord spoke to Paul, he gave a:

- Do not;
- Do
- Do not;
- And He then gave three promises.

One of those promises, is a promise which is valid for all Christians, And the other two were promises that were specifically for Paul, in that place of Corinth.

So, what was the first “Do not”??? Do not--- What?

Do not --- be afraid

A little boy had a part in the school play that read, “It is I; be not afraid.” And he tentatively stumbles out on stage and says, “It’s me, and I’m scared.”ⁱ

Have you ever felt like that little boy? We know in our heads, that we’re **not** supposed to be afraid – We know in our heads, that God **is** with us – We know in our heads, that God **will** give us the strength we need, to get through whatever gets thrown at us.... But fear rises to the surface, and it holds us back... And we’re left with: Fear; anxiety; worry...

But what fear is the Lord specifically talking about here. Well, let’s go on to the “Do”, and the next “Do not”.

“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent,

What sort of fear’s he talking about here?

He’s not talking about the fear of spiders, or fear of snakes, or fear of heights...

All **these** sorts of fears, are actually God-given fears. We **have** these fears for a very good reason – because they represent dangers for us to avoid. *I remember one time as a kid, our pet galah just screeched and squawked and squawked... and we went out to see what was going on, and there was a snake in the bird cage... He was afraid for a very good reason – he was about to become dinner for that slithery fiend....*

And God has built into **us**, the capacity to fear – the capacity to be afraid – and for good reason – Sometimes it’s right to be afraid, so that we give dangerous situations, a wide berth...

But that’s **not** the sort of fear that the Lord’s talking about here... He’s talking about a fear that does **not** come from God – He’s talking about a fear that comes from the evil one – a fear of being a witness for Jesus.

Some of my favourite TV shows are Police shows, or law shows... And a common theme, that they often put in their story-line, is that of a witness being afraid to testify against the baddy, because they’re afraid of what’s going to happen to them.

They’re afraid to be a witness, and so they’re not a witness at all.

A witness is someone who tells what they know. A witness is someone who tells what they’ve seen. A witness is someone who tells what they’ve experienced, or what they know to be true.

A witness is **not** the person who saw – a witness is the one who **tells** what they saw. A witness is not just someone who knows something. A witness is someone who speaks out and testifies, to **what** they know.

And so when the Lord said to Paul, **“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent,** He’s telling him, “You keep on being my witness.” ... Don’t let your fear stop you from witnessing... Actually don’t be afraid of it at all...

Bravery is when we act, despite our fear, but he's not telling Paul to be brave – He's telling him to not be afraid (2 different things).

And that fear that Paul had (and this is the reason that I wanted to take these 2 verses, and spend a bit of time of them) – that very same fear, is the fear that many of us have....

True??? – We're afraid to speak about Jesus. We're afraid to testify about the goodness of God... And so we say----- nothing...

And that's just the way Satan would have it. The Lord has built into us, a capacity to fear, so that we give danger a wide berth. But Satan twists that God-given capacity to fear, so that we're afraid to do the very thing that we were **created** to do.

We were created to worship God. We were saved to be worshippers of God. We were saved, to testify to His greatness, and His goodness, and His mercy... We were saved, to be witnesses for Jesus Christ....

And yet, in our self-absorption, we sometimes treat life (and even our salvation) as if it's "all about us"... It's not, you know – it's all about Jesus. The Lord saves, for **His** glory... And we are to be witnesses to that glory – we are to glorify the Lord, for what He has done in Christ Jesus, and the best way we can do that, is to tell others how Jesus has saved us, and how He will be their saviour too ...

But fear prevents us from being the witnesses that we were created to be.

How do you tell the difference between a God-given fear, and a Satanic fear?

- A God-given fear, preserves us from evil
- A Satanic fear, prevents us from good.

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So, why should we not be afraid to speak out, and to tell others about Jesus?

Well, the first promise He gave, is a promise for all Christians. In fact, it's not actually stated as a promise – it's stated as a statement of fact – this is something which has already come to pass – it is something which is already true: **Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you.**

- In Genesis, the Lord said to Isaac, ^{Genesis 26:24.....} **Fear not, for I am with you.....**
- He said to Jacob, ^{Genesis 28:15} **Behold, I am with you and will keep you**
- He said through Isaiah, ^{Isaiah 41:10} **fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God....**
- He said to Jeremiah, ^{Jeremiah 1:8} **Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you...**
- When Jesus sent His disciples out with the great commission, He said, ^{Matthew 28:20} **And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

Are you starting to see a bit of a pattern here???? Don't be afraid!!.. Why not? Because God is with us... Jesus has not

left us alone – He’s with us... And if God is for us, then who can be against us? Psalm 23:4 (ESV)

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

It’s a promise. It’s a statement of fact. If you feel that God has deserted you, your feelings are wrong.

And then Jesus gave Paul 2 promises, that were specific for Paul, in the city of Corinth: **no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."**

We can find a whole bunch of promises in the Bible, and some people build their whole theology around claiming **all** of these promises, for themselves. Don’t be too quick to do that, or else you’re going to be disappointed.

You see, the thing, with promises in the Bible:

- Some are made universally, for all disciples of Jesus;
- Some are made conditionally, often for the nation of Israel; and
- Some are made to specific people at a specific time, for a specific circumstance

And it would be wrong for us, to claim that God has made all of these promises to all Christians, at all times...

So, for example, Jesus made 3 promises to Paul:

1. The first promise **I am with you...**

Now, is that a universal promise for all Christians? Yes, it is. Over and over again, Our Lord makes that promise, “Don’t be afraid, for I am with you”. I’m sending you out, and I’m going with you.

2. What about the second promise? **no one will attack you to harm you**

Is that a promise that we can claim today? Is that a universal promise for all Christians – that **we’ll** never be attacked and **we’ll** never be harmed? No, it’s not. Because Jesus has told us (in general), exactly the opposite. He said: ^{John 16:2} ...

Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. That doesn’t sound very safe to me...

He told us, right up front, if you’re going to be My disciples, you have to take up your cross, every day, to follow Me.

And think about Paul. Paul was safe in Corinth alright... But he’d been attacked many times before he arrived there. And he would later on, spend many years in prison, and he was eventually killed for his faith... This promise of safety, was only for the time that he was in Corinth.

3. What about the third promise? **I have many in this city who are my people**

Well, that also, was specific to Corinth. In some places, Christ will be received with gladness, and in others, Christ will be rejected and Christians will be persecuted.

And so when we read our Bibles, we've gotta be real about it. When you see a promise in God's word, have a good, honest look: Is this promise a universal promise, for all Christians, and therefore a promise that I can rely on today? (and there are many of them that are)... Or is it a promise made in a specific context, to a specific person, for a specific purpose? And if so, I can't rightfully claim that as a promise to me.

So, where does that leave us? Well, it leaves us with one promise, but let me tell ya, that one promise is enough. **Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you.**

Jesus hasn't promised you, that you'll be safe, if you openly testify, to the goodness of God. In fact Jesus has told us, that it's probably going to be pretty dangerous.... But we should keep on doing it, because in that danger, Christ is with us.

In Matthew 10, Jesus said: ²⁶ **"So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more**

value than many sparrows. ³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

The command that is made of us, is to keep on witnessing – to keep on speaking, and to not be silent. We are more valuable to God, than anything else in creation. And we shouldn't be afraid. Even in danger, don't be afraid.

What's the worst that anybody could ever do to us? Well, they could kill us. But they're not taking my life from me, because I've already given my life to Jesus... Do you get this? If you've already given your life away, no one can take it from you – it's already gone...

But to us, this may all sound so “un-real”... Honestly, who here, has their life threatened if they testify to the goodness of God??? In some places in the world, this isn't an academic issue – it's very real for them... And I won't be surprised if, within my lifetime, Christians who fearlessly speak the truth, will be in danger of going to prison in this country...

But who of us now, is in any **real** danger of speaking????

When we're afraid to speak the Name of Jesus, to a world who needs to hear it, that fear is not a Godly fear.

If Jesus is with us, in what way is that fear real? Maybe to get the truth through to us, we need to repeat this over and over again:

I will not be afraid, but I will go on speaking and I will not be silent, for the Lord is with me.

Will you say that with me?

I will not be afraid, but I will go on speaking and I will not be silent, for the Lord is with me.

When you feel the Lord urging you to tell a friend about Jesus, and that fear begins to grow, how do you overcome that fear? (Let's say it together.)

I will not be afraid, but I will go on speaking and I will not be silent, for the Lord is with me.

When you can see that someone is really hurting, and you know they need to experience the love of Jesus, but you're afraid, to say something to them, what are you going to say?

I will **not** be afraid, but I will go **on** speaking and I will not be silent, for the Lord is with me.

When a very clever and academic sort of a person poo-poops the faith, and you're afraid to respond, what are you going to say?

I will not be afraid, but I will go on speaking and I will not be silent, for the Lord is with me.

Do you believe that? If you believe it, then say it with me again.

I will not be afraid, but I will go on speaking and I will not be silent, for the Lord is with me.

Be encouraged.

Time of Sharing:

On Friday, I sent out an email and text, giving a bit of a heads up, and I asked if anyone could be prepared to share a bit of a testimony about what we've been discussing today.

I hope there are a few people who are willing to not be afraid, but to speak up and not be silent, about a time when you were afraid to tell someone about Jesus, but the Lord was with you, and you did it anyway, and the fear was gone.

I will not be afraid, but I will go on speaking and I will not be silent, for the Lord is with me.

ⁱ Green, Michael P. 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching. Baker Books: Grand Rapids. 1989. No.500