

Part 33: Graces for Gospel Ministry

Tyler Velin | Acts 18:1-18

April 27, 2025

If you've watched the Marvel Avenger's series, you'll probably remember a powerful scene in one of the films. There comes a moment where it seems all is lost. Captain America stood, nearly alone, beaten, and weakened before an opposing army that would certainly overwhelm him. But at one point—he heard over his radio, “Steve, can you hear me? Steve, can you hear me? On your left.”

Confused, Captain America looks over and sees the help and encouragement he needed—the whole fleet of Avengers and their forces came just in the nick of time.

Interestingly, the actor who delivered that line recorded it on his phone, was unaware of its context or importance. He simply received a call from his Producer to record it and send it. Only at the premier did he realize the massive impact it had not only on his role—but on the movie as a whole.

While I don't mean to fantasize anything—a life of following Jesus often feels lonely, isolated and ineffective. Sometimes we feel like side characters who have little to no meaning. All we do is mutter seemingly insignificant lines that hardly matter compared to those in more important roles.

Or maybe some of you feel like Captain America—overwhelmed on the field, stuck in sin, and evangelistically stalled. We might wonder—“Is this where it ends?”

But our passage today reveals an important reality—how seemingly small and unconnected roles come together for meaningful gospel work. When things seemed bleak for Paul, God provided meaningful partners and motivation to carry the gospel forward.

My hope today is that we might see how God uses our roles, even small ones, for our good, others' encouragement, and his global mission. God calls every Christian to ministry, but we are never alone in ministry.

Our big idea today is this: **God gives lots of graces so we can share Jesus in lots of places.**

We are going to see these graces in for ways today: **Fellow Laborers, Faithful Scriptures, A Sovereign God, Secular Servants.**

Last week we read of Paul in Athens, but today he arrives in the commercial capital of the Roman Empire--Corinth. It was a massive town by ancient standards boasting nearly 300,000 people. If Athens was Vegas, Corinth was Wall Street. It boasted two strategic ports and one land bridge which made it the commercial trading capital of the region.

Paul has been chased around Asia and Europe by persecution and need so he's used to adapting to new places. But what's interesting is that for the first time Luke doesn't record anyone traveling with Paul. Even in Athens he was dropped off by friends—but here he lands in the fast paced metropolis of Corinth seemingly alone.

I'm an introvert and I often feel the most alone in a crowd--especially when I don't know anyone. And here, Paul who has traveled over 1,000 miles from his sending church, finds himself as a small fish in a big pond. And yet, God reminds him that he is not alone.

Here is our first point this morning: the grace of **Fellow Laborers**.

Read with me: **Acts 18:2-4**, "And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tent makers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks."

So here we meet two characters who will be important for the remainder of Paul's ministry: Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They are Christian Jews and, therefore, religious refugees. At this point in time, the Roman government couldn't see the differences between Christians and Jews—so when the Emperor Claudius kicked out the Jews from Rome he also removed the Christians.

They traveled from Rome to Corinth where they picked up their work as tradespeople. But in God's providence, not only did Paul find them in Rome, but it is told that they all shared the same vocation as tent-makers—or leatherworkers.

This means that Paul had a day job. He worked in industry and moonlighted as a missionary. Today we still hear of bi-vocational pastors or missionaries being called "tentmakers."

Paul wasn't opposed to pastors and missionaries being paid. In fact, he encourages the church in Ephesus to pay their pastors. In writing to the Corinthian's later on Paul says that it would have been his right to accept pay from them—but that he chose instead to present the gospel "free of charge." Now, why did Paul do this—and how was he able to do this?

Why he did it is made clear in **1 Corinthians 9:12**. He laid down his right, not desiring to "put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ." What does he mean by that? He realized that already there were opportunistic men who traveled around preaching the gospel for money—not for ministry. Our world today often knows too much of people like this from televangelists with private jets to pastors who are more concerned about their platform than their people. But already, Paul wanted them to know that he wanted nothing from them except for their pure affection for Jesus Christ.

Now, how is he able to make that happen? Life is expensive—and even as healthy church members you might know that ministry is time consuming as well. He's able to pull this off in two ways.

The first is through the gospel entrepreneurship of Aquila and Priscilla. In a crowded marketplace—they opened own shop and home to Paul. You can visit Corinth today and see the remains of the shops Paul most likely worked in. They were small business stalls on the ground level, with a small living quarters up top.

And Luke tells us that Priscilla and Aquila not only opened up their home and table to Paul like Lydia did in Philippi—but they also opened up their business to him.

While Priscilla and Aquila will go on to be leaders of the church in Ephesus—at this point all we know about them is that they are Christian business people who realize their ministry as church members includes their labors in the marketplace.

These two weren't taking money from the church for ministry—but they were willing to use their business to fund Paul's ministry. Think of the potential risk this would have been for them: every tent he sold—they didn't sell, every mistake he made was a threat to the reputation they labored long to establish, and every customer he won over was one they lost. Yet they were more concerned with eternal profit than immediate profit.

As we look out into our own economic culture and vocational aspirations—might we be challenged by the ordinary faithfulness of these two! I know there are many organizations that exist today whose primary goal is to run successful, God-honoring, and people-serving businesses so that they might employ pastors or missionaries who are bi-vocational. To the business owners and bosses in here—my hope is that through evangelism or partnerships you might find Christians who are employed by you. Why would it look like to use your business to help support their ministry in the church?

As a church we want to raise up more men for vocational ministry--what if you were able to open up part time positions that help make it more affordable for those who want to pursue training in ministry?

College students, how might the career you're working for serve God's global mission? I know business consulting companies who do very good work--and yet they employ missionaries so they can get work visas into countries which otherwise wouldn't let Christians in. I know there's one man here at church who helps build online businesses that missionaries can run overseas that help supplement their necessary support.

We don't see that Aquila and Priscila were millionaires who underwrote all of Paul's ministry--but they do show what it looks like to be a gospel entrepreneur.

This economic partnership was the first way Paul was helped financially. We see the second in **Acts 18:5**, "When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus."

While it might be hard to see at first—we notice that as soon as Silas and Timothy arrived Paul became occupied with the word. That idea is meant to stand in contrast to the tent making work he was doing prior to their arrival.

He was able to shift his primary occupation to the ministry of the word because with Silas and Timothy came a financial gift from the church in Philippi. Writing to the Philippian church he says, **Philippians 4:14-15**, "Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only."

Ministry costs--and it was the generosity of other churches that freed up Paul financially to give his full attention to missions. The church in Philippi wanted Paul to come back to them—but they were so concerned with the glory of God that they gave their own money so that Paul could stay and minister in a town far from them.

A healthy church is concerned not only for those in their midst—but for the workers that the Lord has across the globe. Our annual budget is coming up and we want our church's budget to show this priority as well. Our ministry budget is split almost evenly between ministry here at Sovereign Hope and ministry outside our church across western Montana and internationally.

As a church, and as individuals—I pray that we continue to support and enable workers to the glory of God. We will never know how much our prayers and our pocketbook encouraged others to continue in faithful ministry.

Next we see the grace of **Faithful Scriptures**. We already saw that when Paul arrived he preached from the scriptures--and even as more time and resources were available to him he didn't pivot his strategy even though it wasn't well received.

Look at the response of the Jews in **Acts 18:6**, "And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

Paul didn't get up and say the same thing from the same scripture every week—but as Paul tried appeal to the Bible in different ways—he didn't give up the Bible.

It can be frustrating at times when we fail to find the relief we want in scripture—or when we've shared the gospel from the Bible and it the other person still rejects it. When this happens there's a strong temptation for churches and for Christians to pivot from the Bible in total and appeal to culture apart from the Bible.

But Paul here encourages us to not give up the power of God for displays of worldly power. Writing again to the church in Corinth he says this: **2 Corinthians 4:2**, "But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."

Paul practiced what he preached. He labored to apply God's word more faithfully to the world—but he never wanted to make God's word look like the world. And notice how it's only a commitment to the faithfulness of scriptures which can give us such a weighty peace.

It's weighty because the gospel will not always be believed. People rejected Paul's preaching, people rejected Jesus' preaching, and people will reject yours. But notice how Paul brings that weight to bear, "Your blood be on your own head." If the center of our ministry is comfort, financial peace, conservative values or entertainment—people can reject that at very little cost to themselves. But because the center of our ministry is the Bible we can warn people that in rejecting this—they stand in grave danger.

Yet notice Paul's peace, "I'm am innocent, and I'm turning to the Gentiles." I'm an idiot. I'm often an ineffective minister—and I work hard to improve in ministry. But if you want hope in ministry—then commit yourself to the Bible. It's only when we submit our lives and our ministry to this book that we can say, "Ok, I was faithful and now I can turn to be faithful in another context." There's a deep peace knowing we labored with and in what God has given to us.

Paul knows that the gospel will be rejected by some—but the gospel will save others. So in **verse 7** he leaves the synagogue and moves next door into the house of a Gentile named Titius Justus.

But notice the irony! Just when it seemed God's word was ineffective to save the Jews—look at what happened: **Acts 18:8-11**, "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, 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, 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." And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."

And here we see the ultimate grace that guides us to work: **A Sovereign God**.

We saw God's sovereign work in the background—but now it comes to the forefront. Paul left the synagogue—but the gospel didn't. After Paul left the ruler of the synagogue believed. God is a better missionary than you—and it's often his privilege to remind us of that.

Just like the actor who recorded an obscure line on his phone, when we faithfully preach Christ we can trust God's faithful timing. He will work through his word to save his people, when he so chooses. Sometimes we get to see his timing come to fruition, sometimes we don't.

When I worked with our campus ministry, I was sharing the gospel for about two months with a kid who ended up ghosting me and ultimately texted saying he wanted nothing to do with this stuff. But some years later, I got a call from him, and he had started going to church in another town--and he called to tell me that everything I shared with him was true and he was grateful I took the time.

I once had the weirdest phone call with a customer support individual in the Philippines. It was with an issue on my phone—and it ended with him asking me for prayer that he might find a good church where he could hear more of what we just talked about.

Did he ever go? I don't know. Did he ever get saved? I don't know. But I want to trust the faithful God who brings salvation according to his own timeline. If there's one thing we've seen in Acts it's that God is more zealous for the salvation of the lost than we are.

And as Crispus and many other Gentile believers began the first Christian church in Corinth--God encouraged Paul by saying: Don't stop. Keep preaching. Don't be afraid.

Why? He gives two reasons. The first is both sweet and sour: "I am with you." We like that. But then he says, "And no one will attack you...to harm you." But, the second assurance tells us why: because he has many people in that city who are his people.

What does that mean? It means that God is sovereign to save. There are people in Corinth, there are people in your class, in your home, in your office whom God has chosen to save--and he's saying--don't stop because we're going to get this done. You be faithful--and I'll do the work.

Dear Christian, if God saved you by bringing the message of the gospel to your ears--he will save others when you bring the gospel into their ears. Do not lose heart. You don't have the same explicit promise Paul does that no one will attack you to harm you. But we do have a promise that God will save his people through the faithful evangelism of his people.

That's why Paul doesn't cave to those underhanded ways we saw earlier in 2 Corinthians. He goes on to say this: **2 Corinthians 3:3-6**, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

As we bear witness to the light, God opens people's eyes to see it.

If you're not a believer in here today--I'm so glad you're here. Please keep coming, ask the person next to you out to coffee and ask them all the questions you have. But know, as you are working to understand God--God might be working to draw you to him. God saves those who have no intention of being saved by opening their eyes to Jesus.

I sat with a woman once and she said, "I'd love to talk to you about Christianity--but please don't try to convert me." I said, "I promise to not convert you. But I can't promise you won't be converted." Why? Because God only saves his enemies. And he does so when they hear the message of Jesus.

This encouragement from God causes Paul to remain for a year and a half. But over that time period—there's a political change. A new proconsul named Gallio is installed in Corinth—and the Jews use this opportunity to try and convince the new guy that the Christians are a threat to Rome.

But look at what happens next: **Acts 18:12-18a**, "But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, "This man is persuading people 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 wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things." And he drove them from the tribunal. And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this. After this, Paul stayed many days longer..."

And here we see our final, and perhaps most odd grace of God: **Secular Servants**.

Apparently, the gospel has now capture two synagogue rulers. The Jews, upset at Gallio's ruling, take the new ruler--Sosthenes--and they beat him before Gallio. I'm of the persuasion that this because Sosthenes himself is a Christian and they are trying to prove their point to Gallio—but Gallio is totally apathetic.

Yet, God used Gallio's apathy and his secular position to secure for the Christians a legitimate standing in Corinth. Gallio is a pretty well known figure in history and he cared very deeply about the perception of his rule than anything else. He didn't care who was right and who was wrong between the Christians and the Jews—he was just the parent who said, "figure it out among yourselves."

He saw there was now threat of political uprising among the Christians—and despite their worship of the one true and living King—they were generally faithful citizens. His decision not to make a decision meant that as far as Rome is concerned—Christians are allowed to exist in Corinth.

As we saw last week, God ordains the nations and places of people. While sinful rulers rule sinfully, and good rulers rule imperfectly, we ought to see places where secular laws and policies allow us faithful inroads to ministry. And we ought to take advantage of those, and thank God for those. When God used Assyria in Isaiah he said that Assyria was a tool in his hand and yet, "It he did not so intent, and his heart does not realize it." Assyria was doing what was best for Assyria--and yet it served God.

In the Middle East many churches are allowed to exist only because they want western workers to come in and work in their economies. They have no concern for Christians, and yet, their desire for financial stability allows the church to exist. And under their nose, those churches are raising up leaders from the nations and sending them back into closed countries.

Might we see such things and both praise God, and use those opportunities for God.

I know some guys who work for a company that does non-profit matching. So they take advantage of it and donate to their church and to missionaries, and companies that seem unconcerned at best—financially support global missions.

Despite the current state of American politics--we have an embarrassing amount of opportunities and freedoms for gospel ministry. You have every right as an American, and you have conscientious responsibilities as a Christian to engage in political lobbying and discussion. But how much of us are just as concerned, or more concerned about taking advantage of our current political freedoms for the sake of the gospel?

American passports are keys to the world in ways we ought not neglect. While I can't go to certain countries as a pastor, you can get work visas in so many countries for whatever your field of work. And in those countries are churches that need help, and people whom God desires to save.

High school students, I can't start a Bible study on your campus--but you can. God gives those opportunities. Let's take advantage of them.

When we zoom out on this story we see that God is always at work--and he's working all the time to bring his team together even when it seems nothing is going right.

When we begin to see all the ways in which God has given us grace and opportunity--even if it's veiled in worldly apathy--we will find motivation and comfort amidst it all. Dear Christian, do you feel stuck or slow in your work? Look at all the ways God has given you to help and be helped. And may we by God's grace continue to give our lives in small and meaningful ways to the one cause which will never fail.