

Paul in Corinth

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning, brothers and sisters. Good to be here with you, and we'll have a look at that passage together. Now, last week at the Mission-Minded Conference, I mentioned at some point, I think it was during a question time, if you were here, maybe you remember, but that full-time ministry is kind of a difficult and slippery phrase.
- I thought I'd pick up on that and flesh that out a little bit more as we begin this week. I don't know if that's language that you're familiar with, but certainly as I was recruited and trained for myself for this kind of work, that was often the language that was used.
- Have you considered full-time ministry? Now, ministry is just another word for service, and that's where the confusion about this phrase begins, because, of course, all Christians are to be full-time servants of the Lord Jesus.
- That is one way of defining a Christian. When we say Jesus is our Lord, what that means is that we are his servants, his slaves even.
- That's what a Lord was in the ancient world, someone who owned slaves. And when someone becomes a Christian, it's because, having been bought by Christ's blood, we recognize that he now owns us, and we must submit to him as our Lord.
- [1 : 1 9] So, have you considered full-time ministry starts to sound like a bit of a conversion conversation, doesn't it? Is this what we should be asking unbelievers?
- Have you considered full-time ministry? Have you considered having Jesus as your Lord? Or perhaps it's a question for a lazy or disobedient Christian, kind of half-hearted disciple.
- Have you considered how the Lord Jesus needs to be Lord of every area of your life? You know, you can't be a part-time slave.
- And the Master knows. But, of course, that's not what people usually mean when they talk about full-time ministry. At least, I don't think it's what they were asking me. They mean something like full-time ministry of the Word and prayer.
- You know, pastoral ministry, missionary work, evangelistic outreach. But, of course, is that language really appropriate? I mean, if that's what we're talking about, then no Christians are doing that all of the time.
- [2 : 2 3] Nor should they be. I mean, Roy and Dave and I still need to wash and eat and sleep, and I hope they're doing that, because I am. And we ought to be involved in all sorts of other good deeds as well, other than just proclamation and prayer, just like everyone else.
- In fact, there would be something profoundly wrong about preaching and praying, and not practicing what you preach. I don't know if that's one of us, but anyway, we'll just ignore that. You know, as it were, stepping down from the pulpit and going out to love your neighbor and work with your hands, really important for preachers to do, just as much as for anyone else, give generously.
- Now, which brings me to the passage before us this morning, and the question you've got on your outline, hopefully, which is, was Paul in full-time ministry? Was Paul in full-time ministry?

And of course, you may think that's a rather obvious question. Of course, he was. The great apostle Paul was always busy doing his master's work. And yes, that's true.

In that sense, since his conversion, he always knew himself to be a slave of the Lord Jesus. And yet, in this passage, at least to begin with, notice Paul was not engaged in what we might call full-time ministry in the sense of full-time ministry of the word and prayer.

[3 : 44] No, in fact, he spent most of the week in those early days in Corinth making tents. And it was only once a week on each Sabbath day that he got the chance to go into the synagogue and try to persuade Jews and God-fearing Greeks of the gospel.

And I think that's really intriguing and encouraging for us, especially if you also are a tent maker, so to speak.

What I mean is that even though there are lots of things about Paul that make him unique, Paul was an apostle, specially commissioned by the Lord Jesus to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

We all know that, I hope, and we know that we're not apostles. And basically, if anyone ever comes along and tells you that they are an apostle, then run a mile. Unless we're in glory and greet them warmly.

But anyway, in other words, Paul was in some ways very unique, but he wasn't altogether a unique Christian. Time and time again he calls us to imitate him.

[4 : 45] And in particular, in this regard, Paul seems to have deliberately engaged in tent making and manual labor, secular work, so to speak, so as to set an example for other believers.

For instance, in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, he says, For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you.

It was not because we do not have the right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. See, Paul, it seems, was quite often getting kind of down and dirty.

Certainly, that's how the Greeks would have thought about his tent making. Laboring with his hands alongside his ministry of the gospel to give his brothers and sisters in these fledgling churches an example to imitate.

To teach us something about work and something about gospel proclamation as well. Because, of course, for most of us, whatever gospel proclamation we get to engage in, it will inevitably have to happen on the side, around the edges of our jobs and other responsibilities.

[6 : 03] And so I think what Paul shows us in this passage, if I can put it like this, is that being mission-minded is not so much about an office you might fill or a position you might take in a church or whatever, whether you get paid or not, or anything like that.

But it's about your mindset. It's kind of obvious. It's about your priorities. To put it another way, there's an old saying that everyone's either a missionary or a mission field.

You heard that one? Which is to say that if you really get the gospel, you'll be on about sharing the gospel. If you're not on about sharing the gospel, you might not have got the gospel at all.

Your aim in life, your goal, your true career will be about the proclamation of the gospel. So you might have to make tents on the side.

You might have to do some accounting work along the way, some scientific research, some PE teaching or plumbing or whatever it is. And these things are all good things. People need their tents.

[7 : 05] I just bought a tent so I can go to CMS. You know, I'm glad somebody made it and made it well. It would be nice if someone did some plumbing in it. But anyway, and whenever we do our work, we should do it for the love of our neighbors and the glory of God.

But in the end, tents are only temporary. And what people really need is the eternal refuge of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that is what we must live for to bring them to Him.

Tent making must never become our reason for living, our true career and our ultimate pursuit. And I may say, no matter how successful your tent making business is or how high up in the business you are or how many hours you necessarily have to devote to that work for the Lord, which may be many, many hours.

But apart from that, every Christian must also be devoted to the work of the Lord, the work of proclaiming His gospel. That must be our highest priority.

The most important thing Paul did each week, and we're thankful that he did it, aren't we? The most important thing Paul did each week, even while he was making tents most of the time, was each Sabbath in the synagogue he took a break from his tent making business and he went and preached the gospel.

[8 : 31] And likewise, although it may seem small, and although it may only take up, necessarily only take up a small part of your week, if you've got a mission mindset, what will be most important to you each week is that opportunity to preach the gospel to your little RI class, perhaps, for half an hour, or to lead your growth group once a week, or when you carve out a lunchtime to take a colleague out for a coffee and read the Bible with them, or when you sit down in the evening and read the Bible with your kids.

Here's where we are providing our friends and neighbors and family members with permanent dwellings. Financial advice about treasures in heaven.

Legal advice that will protect them on the judgment day. You know, insert your job here, whatever it is. All right, now, let's get the lay of the land before we look at some of the details of the passage this morning.

There are basically five sections to work through, and again, hopefully you've got those five points on your outline, but just a bit of a heads up, let me warn you. We're going to spend almost all of our time on the first three sections, and almost no time on the last two, as fascinating as they are.

But almost all of our time on the first three sections, if you're a note taker, just bear that in mind as well. There's nothing for the end of the page. But Paul is engaged in tent making in the first section, verses one to four.

[9 : 54] I've spent a lot of time on alliteration this week. In fact, I got a bit carried away, so don't hold that against me. But in verses one to four, we see Paul tent making in Corinth, engaged in his part-time passion.

Now, Corinth was a very important city in the ancient world, about 200,000 citizens. It was situated on a very narrow strip of land. I don't know if I've got a map of this.

Yeah, there you go. There's Corinth. Between the Aegean Sea on the one side and the Ionian Sea on the other. And you can see that there were two ports that were closely connected to the city of Corinth, Lycaeus and Cancra.

And this meant that it was a very strategic position for trade. It's only about nine kilometers across this little strip of land. And actually, there was a Roman road right across it so that people could even drag their ships from one side to the other.

They've since built a canal there. So it stood at this critical juncture between the two halves of Greece by land, and the east and west of the Mediterranean by sea.

[10 : 59] Now, if we just zoom out a little bit, hopefully you can see that it was about 60 kilometers overland from Athens. And that's where Paul had just come from in chapter 17. And if we zoom out even more, you can see how helpful it would be for sailors and merchants going back and forth, particularly between Rome and Ephesus.

They don't want to go all the way around Greece through dangerous waters. So it was just so much easier to cut across through. Corinth. And in many ways, you can probably imagine what that might do to the character of the city.

Lots of sailors. It was a very wealthy, very cosmopolitan city. Lots of merchants, traders, sailors. And high up on the hill overlooking the city, there was, though you can't see it there now, but a temple to the goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of sex, love, and beauty.

Corinth. And Corinth was a very sexually promiscuous city. In fact, it was infamously immoral. It even became a verb in Greek. So to Corinthianize was to practice fornication.

Because Corinth was so famous for its prostitutes. So in verse 1, Paul arrives in Corinth. He's just come from Athens, having of course been beaten with rods in Philippi, and then imprisoned, chased out of Thessalonica by a mob of angry Jews, and then chased out of Berea by that very same mob who followed him from Thessalonica just to harass him.

[12 : 27] Then when Paul got to Athens, he was distressed by their idolatry and ridiculed by their well-to-do philosophers there. And now he's come to Corinth, the world's brothel, the SDI capital of the world, if you like.

And we don't need to wonder at how he was feeling, because he tells us how he was feeling in his letter to the Corinthians. He says in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, And I, when I came to you brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with a 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 it's not hard to see why, is it? Paul's getting a bit of a reputation for being a troublemaker.

How are things going to go in this city? Another beating? Another stoning? Another quick getaway? You know, I think if it were you or me, we might be tempted to think.

I might be tempted to think. I mustn't be doing this right. I must be doing something wrong. You know, I think I'll just keep my head down in this city.

[13 : 39] I don't think it's going to go well if I adopt the same old approach. I mean, that's the definition of insanity, isn't it? Trying the same old thing again and again and expecting a different result.

And I really don't think I could take another angry mob. Now, if at all that was what Paul was thinking, and if perhaps that's the way we might be tempted to think at work or at school or at uni, then I think we have before us a passage that is designed to encourage us.

In fact, as we'll see, it was a time when Jesus deliberately stepped in to encourage Paul to keep going. But first of all, in verses 1 to 4, God gives Paul two companions, Aquila and Priscilla.

Now, by the sounds of things, these two were Christians before they met Paul. We don't know their whole backstory, but Luke wants us to know that Aquila was originally from Pontus. That's now northern Turkey. He wants us to know that they were Jews who had been working in Rome.

Until, in verse 2, Claudius, that's the Emperor Claudius, had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And we know from other historical sources that he did that probably in AD 49.

[14 : 51] Quite possibly because the message about Jesus was causing such a stir among the Jews in the city of Rome, although we can't be certain of that little detail. But anyway, you can imagine these two running their business in Rome, making tents, going to church or whatever, and then all of a sudden, for whatever reason, they've been forced by the Emperor to leave Rome.

What a disaster. They're refugees. And yet, in God's kindness, in his gracious providence, it sounds like these two were the perfect companions lined up for Paul when he arrived in Corinth.

And many years after this, writing to the Christians in Rome, when obviously Priscilla and Aquila had returned there, Paul writes in Romans 16, greet Prisca, and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.

Greet also the church in their house. See, evidently, these two became lifelong friends, Paul's co-workers, and it all started when he was feeling very low in weakness and fear and much trembling, starting out in a new city, trying to have the courage to keep speaking the gospel boldly.

Now, in verse 5, when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. Now, I think the ESV slightly misses the mark here.

[16 : 20] Perhaps it's just too subtle, but the NIV makes it clearer, and the NET. In the NIV, verse 5 reads, when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, or again in the NET.

Now, when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul became wholly absorbed with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

You see, it's in verse 5 that we might say Paul steps back into full-time ministry as he has the opportunity in the sense of full-time gospel proclamation. He becomes wholly absorbed, probably because when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, they brought money with them.

We know this from a couple of comments Paul makes elsewhere. For instance, in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, Paul says, I robbed other churches, again running to the Corinthians, I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.

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. In other words, when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, they brought funds to Paul from the churches up there, other churches like Philippi, perhaps the Bereans, the Thessalonians, so that Paul no longer needed to support himself tent-making, but he could focus, again, exclusively on preaching the gospel.

[17 : 51] And notice also what his gospel was, how Luke describes his message and his method in this verse. Paul was testifying, which has to do with solemnly telling the truth.

Originally, it was a word used in courtrooms about witnesses speaking under oath. Earlier in verse 4, he talked about reasoning and persuading. That is, Paul set before them cogent, forceful arguments.

In verse 11, he used the word teaching, meaning to explain and inform and clarify things. In other words, that is what gospel ministry is about. It's about teaching, persuading, reasoning, arguing, testifying.

Because we have a message, a declaration that needs to be announced forcefully, boldly, that Jesus is Lord, and then it needs to be explained and defended and impressed upon people.

See how Luke describes the announcement. What was the message Paul was proclaiming? That the Christ was Jesus. In other words, the long-awaited king, the Christ, the Messiah, the king the Jews had been waiting for, for at least a thousand years since King David, what Paul was doing for people was identifying the Christ, pointing to him, saying, brothers and sisters, God has sent him to us.

[19 : 16] He has come. He has begun to reign. His name is Jesus. And of course, that needs to be defended and explained, because it doesn't look like Jesus is king, does it?

And how could he be king since we all know he was publicly executed? So that all needs to be explained and justified with good reasons. And that's what Paul devoted himself to doing.

But as usual, as we've come to expect, Paul's compatriots in Corinth did not respond positively, by and large, to his message. Again, reading through Paul's letters to the Corinthians, we know why they didn't appreciate what Paul had to say.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

So in verse 6, 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.

[20 : 24] Paul is alluding to the watchman in Ezekiel 33, describing himself as a prophet. That's why I've called this section Paul's prophetic proclamation.

You know the job of the watchman, don't you? It's a pretty straightforward job, really. You've just got to stand on the wall, keep a lookout, and if the enemy comes, you've got to blow your trumpet and shout a warning to the city.

Well, in Ezekiel 33, God appoints Ezekiel to be a watchman. Ezekiel tells us, The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land and the people of the land take a man from among them and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, and if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.

He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take the warning. His blood shall be upon himself, but if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life.

But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so the people are not warned and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.

[21 : 54] So you, Son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. And you see, brothers and sisters, that's what Paul saw as his task in his own day.

The appointment of the Christ means the imminent arrival of the judgment day. Because the two events go hand in hand.

The judgment day is how the Christ establishes and orders his reign, his kingdom. So as Paul preaches that Jesus is the Christ, he is also warning people to prepare for the judgment day and turn back to God.

And again, later on in Ezekiel chapter 33, just a few verses later, God says to Ezekiel, say to them, as I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live, turn back, turn back from your evil ways.

For why will you die, O house of Israel? See, this is the plea of the loving, gracious God that comes to us in the gospel. Turn back, turn back.

[23 : 04] I don't want you to die. Jesus came to rescue us from our sins and from the punishment we deserve for them. And friends, this is still the message we have to share today, isn't it?

And now we're not all Ezekiels or Pauls, prophets or apostles in that sense. But as we have opportunity, if we will not warn people of the wrath to come, surely we are cruel and callous, guilty watchmen.

I mean, perhaps someone will say, but I'm not a watchman. Well, okay, maybe we can hash that out later. But even if you're just a concerned citizen, you know, if you happen to pass by and you see that the enemy is coming, will you not warn the people?

Friends, I know sometimes it is hard to keep speaking about judgment. In fact, it is hard to keep hearing about judgment, isn't it? Don't know if that's how you feel about church sometimes.

Why can't we be more positive? Every week we seem to talk about our sins and God's wrath. It's so depressing. And of course, there are churches and denominations where they don't.

[24 : 23] Whereas, as it were, the whole aim of church every week is to be uplifting and inspiring. And the point is to send people out feeling happy and hopeful. And sometimes, of course, church should feel like that.

In fact, very often, I hope. But not always. And not without the warning on the other side. Because salvation doesn't make sense unless you know what you're being saved from.

And it's not miserable and gloomy to talk about sin and God's wrath if you're holding out the way of escape. And the job of the watchman is not to proclaim peace, peace, when there is no peace.

So that everyone can get on in blissful ignorance. The job of the watchman is to shout doom and gloom and death and destruction and fire and brimstone.

To warn people that if they do not act, they will be swept away in the judgment. Now, as was his usual practice, having turned to the Jews first.

[25 : 30] And been, by and large, rejected. Paul then turns his attention to the Gentiles. Although, take a look at verse 7. It really is, I think, astonishing and slightly hilarious.

He left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. It's unbelievable. 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. Isn't that amazing? You can imagine every week, can't you? The crowds turn up and they have a choice. Head into the old synagogue.

Head along to this new gathering at Titius Justus' house. You see your old friends heading into the synagogue? Yeah, well, what do you do? So smile politely. They give you menacing looks.

You traitors. And remarkably, one of the guys who chooses to leave the synagogue and start going next door is the synagogue ruler. Crispus.

[26 : 31] And his whole household. It must have been infuriating for the congregation that remained. I can only imagine how stressful it must have been for Paul.

And remember, you know, Paul, not fearless and bold and confident, because apostles were always like that, but tired and scared and facing this almighty backlash.

So in verse 9, the Lord shows still more grace to him. With a sort of recommissioning, if you like. We're up to point 3 on your outline.

Recommissioned by the risen Lord. Paul's persevering promises. Now these P's are really starting to get ridiculous, aren't they? That one was a stretch. But I think if there are key verses in this passage, here they come.

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.

[27 : 35] And he stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God among them. See that? Isn't that wonderful? Another encouragement for Paul. Surely it was just what the doctor ordered.

The temptation for all of us, no less for the apostle, whenever we face opposition, we desperately want to keep silent, don't we? I know I do.

To stop speaking, stop causing so much trouble. Because we're so afraid. But Jesus has three reasons why Paul should not keep silent.

Three promises to encourage him to keep going. Number one, Jesus says, I am with you. That might be the best one, eh? And of course, this is the promise Jesus gave to all of us.

And at the Great Commission, when he said to his disciples, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

[28 : 40] And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. The first reason to keep speaking is that we are not abandoned.

We are not alone. Jesus is with us. Just as he was for Paul, Jesus is with all of us as we try to make disciples until the end of the age. But the second reason Jesus gives Paul is a bit unique to him.

Jesus says to him, and no one will attack you to harm you. It's a specific promise of protection for Paul while he's in Corinth. Because, of course, elsewhere Paul does get attacked.

But Jesus is promising him here a kind of moment of reprieve. Still, it ought to remind us that Jesus is always in control. If we are attacked for the gospel, it's not that Jesus couldn't have done something.

But just that in his plans and purposes for us, which we may not immediately understand, Jesus allows his people to go through suffering, to fill up what is lacking in his affliction.

[29 : 48] But thirdly, Jesus says to Paul, the third reason to keep on speaking is that I have many in this city who are my people. Paul, that's why Jesus doesn't want Paul to be driven out of the city just yet.

Because there are still plenty more people here for you to reach Paul. Again, it's not as if this verse just directly applies to us. We don't know how many people in Brisbane the Lord might have chosen for himself.

But we can take on board the principle. See, the book of Acts, if you remember all the way back to chapter 1, the book of Acts is about the Acts of the risen Lord Jesus, the worldwide mission of the Lord Jesus.

He is the director, the commander, the master strategist, overseeing his mission all the way. Having poured out his spirit, he is sending out his word on the lips of his people.

And because he has chosen certain people across the world, who he wants to bring to salvation, who he wants to make his own, because he has chosen them, he is orchestrating this whole thing so that he can reach them.

[30 : 57] Roy, I want you to be up here in Brisbane, because I have people in this city. So that I'm going to call them to myself through you.

Paul and Debbie, I want you guys in the Philippines. Barry and Marilyn, I want you guys in Centenary. Because I have people in Centenary who I'm going to call to myself. They belong to me. Now, he doesn't usually tell us exactly where he wants us.

I think that was a pretty special thing for Paul. But the same thing still applies wherever we are. Brothers and sisters, keep speaking. Don't be afraid. Don't be silent. Because this is the master plan of our master in heaven.

He has people all over the world, all around us, who he wants to reach with his gospel. And he intends to use us to do it.

All right, now, we're almost done. And as I said, I don't want to go through the rest of the passage in as much detail. But let me just summarize what I think we see. The funny thing about verse 12 is that having just been told that he wouldn't be attacked, in verse 12, Luke tells us immediately that Paul was attacked.

[32 : 08] Of course, this does seem to come 18 months after his vision. So maybe the time of protection has come to an end. But actually, I don't think that's what's going on. No, instead, the remarkable thing about the whole trial before Galio is that Paul comes away completely unscathed without even having to defend himself.

Before he can get a word in edgewise, Galio sticks up for him. Now, Galio was a very powerful and important man, basically the ruler over all Greece.

This is him. And this is an inscription. You can see his name mentioned there. That says Galion. It's actually a letter from Claudius, the Roman emperor, where he describes Galio as his friend and proconsul.

So you can imagine if Galio wanted to shut down Paul's mission in Corinth, he really could have. Except that Jesus wasn't going to allow that. You see, Jesus stands over and above all the powerful people in this world.

And Jesus has people in this city for Paul to reach. So even though Galio doesn't sound like a very just or compassionate man, I mean, he lets Sosthenes just get beaten up in front of him and he doesn't seem to care, but for his own reasons, he ends up protecting Paul.

[33 : 22] And as it were, he sanctions gospel proclamation across the whole province. Then in verses 18 to 22, we see Paul head back to Antioch on home assignment.

He goes via Ephesus and probably Jerusalem in verse 22, which is a fascinating little reference to the church there in verse 22. And that brings us to the end of Paul's second missionary journey.

So let me wrap up. What are the take homes from this passage? I think the answer is that no matter who you are, if you're a follower of Jesus, if you know the gospel, whether you're a tent maker, having to support yourself, or as it were, you are able to be wholly occupied with the word, getting your support from others, either way, as we have opportunities to speak up for the Lord Jesus, we must speak for him.

And let's look for opportunities because of the great privilege of being involved in his work in the world and the judgment day to come. And when we are afraid, when we are tempted to keep silent, when we are tempted to self-censor, because we think, oh no, I don't think this is going to go very well.

Because these people are just so hardened, so immoral, so wealthy and decadent like the Corinthians were. Let's take comfort from the words of Jesus in this passage, safe in the knowledge that he is the one directing his mission.

[34 : 55] This is his strategy, his master plan for the last days. Do not be afraid, but go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you, and I'll watch over you.

No one's going to harm you without my say-so. And I have many people still out there, perhaps in your neighborhood, perhaps in your workplace, whom I have chosen, and I plan to make them mine.

Let's pray. Loving Father God, we thank you for these precious words of the Lord Jesus.

Please help us to take on these promises, to trust him, and so to not be afraid, but to go on speaking.

We pray that you might save many people in this city, bring them into the family of the Lord Jesus, rescue them from the wrath to come. Use us, even when we are afraid.

[36 : 00] Give us backbone and courage, clarity to keep speaking up. Use our frailties, our weak words, to show off your glory as people come to faith and find salvation and eternal life and resurrection through Jesus.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.