



## 21. 'Crossing the threshold'

Acts 18.<sup>1-17</sup>

### Background

The passage begins with another disruptive and unsettling decree from the emperor in Rome. Luke (the author of Acts), of course, has already observed in his gospel how the decrees of the Roman emperor play into the sovereign providences of the living God (see [Lk.2.1-7](#)). However uncomfortable an experience this was for Jewish believers like Aquila and Priscilla, the Lord was at work, effectively bringing together a church-planting team in the crucial city of Corinth.

Corinth was on an 'isthmus', a point at which north and south, east and west, all converged: as such, Corinth was a microcosm of the Gentile world, a city which embodied 'the nations'. It was notorious in the ancient world for being something of a spiritual cesspit and a moral quagmire. Could the gospel of grace ever be planted there? And where and how would you start?

This passage describes in some ways the ultimate moving 'next door' (see v.7). The apostle Paul moving on from the culture of Athens: Aquila and Priscilla crossing the Aegean Sea and moving in from the ordered life of Rome. Corinth and its people were the 'noisy next-door neighbours' of the Gentile world: and Paul's move there marks the start of a whole new section in the narrative of Luke. In going to Corinth Paul was leaving behind the Jewish world and 'crossing the threshold' right into the murky depths of a realm which was in moral and spiritual darkness.

That it was a daunting step for the apostle to take is evident from how he describes his own experience ([1 Cor.2.1-5](#)): and what happened there was, indeed, a remarkable demonstration of the renewing power and grace of the Spirit of God (see [1 Cor.1.26-31](#) and [1 Cor.6.9-11](#)).

The passage, therefore, affords both encouragement and challenge to ourselves. The encouragement to 'keep on speaking' in the confidence of the presence of God with us and in the assurance of His Spirit's powerful working through us. And the challenge of submitting our weakness, fear and trembling to the sovereignty of God, and trusting Him to build His church out of the rubble of lives that are 'foolish' and 'weak', 'despised' and 'lowly'. Are we up for the challenge? Are we willing to 'cross the threshold'?

**'Days' (1), (4) and (5)** are the ones with which to start, if all aren't possible!

## 1) Monday 24<sup>th</sup> July – on the move

Read [Acts 18.1-3](#)

*“because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them”* (Acts 18.3)

Claudius may have thrown his weight around as emperor: but the Lord is King, and His sovereign providences are writ large across the pages of history. The Lord had plans for Corinth and ensured that His people converged on the city: Jesus is on the move!

Have you experienced the discomfort of being moved unexpectedly by the Lord, on account, for instance, of your work?

**‘Faith means believing in advance what only makes sense in reverse’** (Philip Yancey): **how do you cope with unexpected adversity in your life?**

What friendships has the Lord in His providence given you which have proved so helpful and supportive in the work of the gospel?

**Aquila and Priscilla were mature Christians (see Acts 18.26) whom the Lord brought in to Corinth alongside Paul, a pattern often indicative of the Lord being at work: what examples of this have you known / are you aware of?**

**Prayer:** *On this first ‘working day’ of a new week, Lord, I again submit my every moment to Your sovereign: send me where You will and use me as You will.*

## 2) Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> July – Jesus is the Christ!

Read [Acts 18.4-5](#)

*“.. Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching ..”* (Acts 18.5)

The primary calling of Jesus’ people is the proclamation of the gospel. Starting from the Bible, pointing to Lord Jesus, bearing a personal witness, and presenting a powerful argument for who Jesus is, what He has done and why He matters so much.

What opportunities might you have today to share the good news of Jesus, and how will you plan to go about it?

In a sentence or two, what is your own ‘testimony’ to Jesus being the one in whom you have found life in all its fulness?

**Prayer:** *Help me to recognise the opportunities You give to me today, my Lord, to bear witness to Yourself – and help me to use such moments well, for Your own glory.*

## 3) Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> July – seize the moment!

Read [Acts 18.5-6](#)

*".. from now on I will go to the Gentiles .." (Acts 18.6)*

God means His good news to be heard across the nations: those who closed the door on gospel witness only opened the door for that message to be shared with others. Seize while it's there the chance to heed God's Word: it may not always be there!

How have you learned to cope when those with whom you've been sharing the gospel are either dismissive or disinterested?

Is the Lord laying on your heart new people for you to be sharing the gospel? Speak to Him about this today!

***Prayer:** To whom would You have me speaking today, O Lord? And what would You have me say? Direct my paths that I may fulfil Your will and point others to Jesus.*

#### **4) Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> July – stepping next door**

Read [Acts 18.7-8](#)

*".. many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed .." (Acts 18.8)*

There's a hunger in the hearts of people everywhere: a hunger for meaning and purpose; for life in its fulness; for God. And when Paul went through next door, all sorts of people came to newness of life amidst the moral squalor of Corinth.

The synagogue leader's coming to faith added to the already considerable tension between the 'church plant' and the synagogue: how do you handle the tensions which arise when friends or colleagues profoundly disagree with you?

For a Gentile, entering a synagogue must often have been a daunting prospect – in a way that the house of Titius Justus wouldn't have been: how might we help those unfamiliar with the Christian faith get over that sort of barrier?

Have there been recent converts in your fellowship and how did the different individuals come to faith in Jesus?

Have there been times when you took a bold step of faith outside your 'comfort zone' and the Lord give you some very real, early encouragements?

***Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, for leading me always forward. Give me wisdom to discern Your will, boldness to follow where You lead – and the strength to keep up with You!*

#### **5) Friday 28<sup>th</sup> July – keep on!**

Read [Acts 18.9-11](#)

*".. do not be afraid: keep on speaking, do not be silent, for I am with you .." (Acts 18.9f)*

A city whose lack of morals was notorious. A synagogue right next door whose people were openly hostile. And a ruthless sort of politics whose merest whim could trigger persecution. Who'd not be afraid? But the presence of the risen Lord removes all fear!

What sort of circumstances leave you discouraged, and anxious and fearful of pressing on in the service of the Lord?

Many aspects of the Bible's message are 'no-go areas' so far as today's society is concerned: how frightened are you to articulate the Christian view?

How can you get over such fears?

What has been your experience of the Lord enabling you to persevere when you've been downcast and discouraged?

*Prayer: What wonderful reassurance You give Your people, my Lord! Make me bold and strong in Your service today in the knowledge of Your presence with me always!*

## 6) Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July – vested interests

Read [Acts 18.12-13](#)

*".. the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul .."* (Acts 18.12)

The work of the gospel will invariably be opposed. When wealth, prestige and power are at stake, then potent vested interests kick in! Don't be surprised, therefore, when today, as then, attempts are made to legislate the Bible's message out of circulation.

In what ways today are you aware of attempts being made to stifle the message of the Bible?

How should Christians deal with a situation when false accusations are being levelled against them?

*Prayer: You, O Lord, are the righteous Judge of all the earth. Hear the cries of those who are ill-treated and oppressed, and may Your judgments be tempered with mercy.*

## 7) Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> July – walk humbly with God

Read [Acts 18.14-17](#)

*".. and Gallio showed no concern whatever .."* (Acts 18.17)

The politician ducks out of dealing with sensitive, spiritual issues: and he turns a blind eye when the crowd embrace an anti-semitic line – a whole load easier simply not to get involved! Don't do a Gallio! Act justly. Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God.

Are there issues in your relationships with others which you've been trying to brush under the carpet in the hope that they'll go away?

How should a local body of believers respond to injustices which they're aware of in the society around them?

*Prayer: Forgive me, Lord, when I have kept my head beneath the parapet, preferring simply not to get involved: grant me discernment, integrity, courage and grace.*