

Title: Bulletproof
Text: Acts 18:1-17
Theme: The will of God
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: You are bulletproof until your mission is completed.

Read Text:

Ironman, Superman, Batman, Spiderman, Captain Marvel, Flash, Captain America, the Hulk, Black Widow, Mr. Freeze are all examples of superheroes; people with extraordinary abilities that make them practically bulletproof. Marvel and DC Comics have made a lot of movies and a lot of money off of these characters. It is not just that they are powerful, and that they use their powers for good, but I think that most of us grew up wishing that we had a secret super power that no one knew about, but that we would use discreetly, humbly, carefully but generously, right? I mean, if you had a superpower, you wouldn't have to be afraid. You would be safe. No one could harm you. In fact, all of the bad people would be afraid of you. What would that be like for all of the bad people to be afraid of you?

Dave Dunham is a little more knowledgeable about superheroes than I am, but from what little that I do know, superheroes are divided into two groups; those who actually possess superpowers (like Superman and Captain Marvel) and those who are just really smart or wealthy and have really amazing suits, cars or gizmos (like Ironman and Batman). There's a sense in which the apostle Paul was like a superhero, but not like the ones we are used to. Paul himself did not have any superpowers that he could just use to zap people or break prison bars with. Neither did he have nifty little devices. He was a tool in the hand of God. And God had a specific plan for Paul and because it was God's plan, it was going to be accomplished and Paul's mission in life was to cooperate with that plan and he did. Just as the Lord had a specific plan and mission for Paul, he has one for you. Knowing that God has a specific plan brings 3 responses: faith-driven obedience, calm (resting of soul) and confidence (boldness).

I. God's Plan is God's plan. (9) Your mission: faith-driven obedience

A. It may not always make sense to you. (Corinth vs. Athens)

Speaking to the Areopagus in Athens had to be one of the most incredible opportunities that Paul had experienced up until this point. Athens was historical, cultured, educated, sophisticated, refined, and esteemed. Speaking to the Areopagus would look really impressive on your resume. A friend of mine got into Michigan Stadium one day when hardly anyone was around and went to the 50-yard line and sang the national anthem. He then put on his resume that he sang the national anthem at Michigan Stadium from the 50-yard line. Paul's experience was impressive to many, but the response to Paul's preaching of the gospel in Athens was not overwhelming. I've noted that in several of the accounts, that Luke uses the word "some" and the word "many" to describe the various levels of response to the gospel. In Athens, some responded (17.34), but in Corinth "*many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.*" (18.8) But also remember, that the man who spoke to one of the most esteemed audiences in the entire world

was now sitting in one of the shops in the North Market region of Corinth, sewing and selling leather goods and tents. A tad humbling, don't you think?

A few years later Paul wrote what we call, 1 Corinthians. It was actually his second letter to them, but in the first chapter he says, *“For consider your calling brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”* (1.26-29)

To our way of thinking, Athens would have been a much more strategic place for a large gospel church than Corinth. Athens had the wise, it had the strong, it had the nobility, the learned, it had the respect and influence. But God does not need any of that, in fact, at times, it gets in the way. God often uses those who are lowly in the eyes in the world, those who are rejected, those who are scorned (like Jesus) to accomplish his plan. It is his plan. Corinth was his plan, not Athens. Don't ignore the movers and shakers in this world, but know this, in the history of Christianity, more people get saved in prison than on Wall Street (know what I mean?) If you were going to start a church, it would probably have more fruit on Mediterranean and Baltic Ave than on Park Place and Boardwalk.

B. It may not be convenient.

Corinth was definitely a city with some low-life elements in it. It wasn't like the entire city was that way. There was money in Corinth. They had a big pottery industry, metal manufacturing and carpet weaving but Athens certainly had a better reputation. And yet, the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision when he was in Corinth, not when he was in Athens and told him to stay here and serve here for a while because this was his plan. And here is what I really want to press upon you. We tend to make plans for our lives and then we try to figure out how we can get God to go along with them. If he doesn't, we get angry with God and accuse him of not liking us or not loving us, or not wanting what is best for us, as if the entire life and death of Jesus doesn't count! Beloved, all that you and I know is what you and I know which would not even cover the bottom of a thimble. The wisdom and knowledge of God is oceans and we think that we have the right to judge him! He knows what he is doing and we really don't know what we are doing, even though we think we do. When we come to faith in Christ, we give him the keys. He drives the bus and we hang on. It may not always make sense nor be convenient. But, it is his plan. In fact,

C. It may involve conflict.

Compare the account of Paul in Athens and Paul in Corinth. What do you see? There were all sorts of conflict in Corinth. It didn't seem to be that way in Athens. In Athens, Paul had an opportunity to speak to the authorities because they were interested in hearing more, except that they, for the most part did not believe. In Corinth, Paul gets hauled in before the civil magistrates because they want him to stop, and yet people keep on believing. In Corinth, things got so intense that Paul shook out his garments before he left the synagogue. What was that about? It was a sign of judgment. This act was symbolic of a person who did not want even the dust of

those who were going to be judged to somehow be attached to the clothes. This is on you, Paul was saying. And obviously from what happened a bit later, this conflict was bad. But, what is better, comfort and little fruit (Athens) or conflict and much fruit (Corinth)? God may put you into the middle of conflict because he is going to use what you say and how you live to bring the gospel and bring hope to people who otherwise would not know about Christ. Being in conflict is not comfortable and convenient but it does not mean that you aren't exactly where you ought to be. Granted, many of us have never had a vision as Paul did that spells out things like this specifically, but our mission in life is not conflict avoidance, but in carrying out God's plan.

God primarily uses his Word, his Spirit, and his church to help us sort out what his plan is for us. We saw this with Paul from day one in Antioch when God spoke to the church and they sent Paul and Barnabas out on their first church-planting trip. What does God want me to do? We know that God wants you to trust him. It is his will for you to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5.17-18). His will is for you to be sexually pure (1 Thess 4.3). He wants you to be grateful (1 Thess. 5.13). He wants your mind to be conformed to Christ (Romans 12.1-2). And it is often (not always but often) God's will for you to suffer persecution (1 Peter 4.19). It may be his will for you to get sick. It may be his will for you to die (like Paul eventually did). But, we live with open hands entrusting our lives to him knowing that he does all things well and is worthy of and deserving of our complete trust.

Drew Ansley, his wife and kids live in southwest Detroit near the Ambassador Bridge. Drew started a church there. It is not flashy, trendy, techno-savvy, or hipster. It is pretty raw. He doesn't have high-end SUV's parked out front bringing a husband, wife, and 2.5 kids per vehicle with stable lives, careers and incomes. People do tend to move there because they want to, they tend to live there because they can't get out. But, Jesus has people there. And Drew is there to find them. Your life is on a mission. Your mission is God's plan and your calling is to be faithful to it.

II. God's plan provides calm. (9-10) Your response: resting of soul.

The Lord told Paul that he could and should go on speaking without fear. There were several places, like Philippi where Paul did not stay too long because his presence was so controversial. He seemed at times willing to stay, but others thought it best for him to move on for the sake of the safety of the other believers. I am guessing that in view of how intense things were getting in Corinth that perhaps Paul was thinking that it just might be time to move on. After all there were already a good number of believers. But, the Lord told him to not be afraid and to keep on speaking up. I am with you.

Do you know how many times that particular promise is made in the Bible? God told Moses, "I will be with you." God told Joshua to be strong and courageous because I will be with you. God told Jeremiah to not be afraid because I will be with you. God told the disciples that he would be with them to the end of the age. That is for us. God doesn't abandon his kids. God doesn't leave them alone. I will be with you. I am with you. If God is for us, who can be against us. Can anything separate us from the love of God? I am with you! What an incredible promise! So Paul doesn't leave. He keeps on speaking. For 18 months he stays in Corinth and influence of his life and ministry is huge.

Think of that promise for a second. I am with you. Who is the “I”? This is a promise for every one of God’s children. If you have trusted in Christ, then Christ is your Savior. He saves you from your sin. He saves you from punishment. He saves you from hell. He saves you from hopelessness. He saves you from a meaningless and empty life. I am with you. You! God is with you! This is one of the great joys of advent season. God has come to us in Christ. Immanuel! God with us! That means that God is and that he knows who we are and he cares about us and is at work on our behalf and because he is God and is good, nothing can stop him from carrying out his good and wise plan for us.

When do you get the adrenaline kick in the stomach? When are you prone to get panic attacks? We are prone to anxiety and panic because we find ourselves in situations that we cannot control. I hate to break it to you, but you can’t control much at all. You are not God. God allows you to get into situations that make you aware of that. Jesus, take the wheel. When you believe God that he is with you, what is point of panic? As I tell you, why pray when you can worry? Why pray when you can panic? What is prayer? It is talking to the One who is with you in the midst of the storm so you can remember that you are not alone and you will never be left alone. The presence of God motivates us to obey God. Keep on speaking. And we can keep on speaking the gospel because God’s plan provides confidence that it will be worth it. Rest your soul in his plan.

III. God’s plan provides confidence. (10-11) Your response: boldness for Christ.

Later on, Paul is arrested and brought before the tribunal where he is accused. What does Paul do? He attempts to speak. Here was an opportunity to share the gospel. The Lord promised to be with him, to protect him and told him to keep speaking up and Paul did. The Lord gave him the vision before the arrest so that when it happened he would be ready.

Don’t you want to know that your life is meaningful? Don’t you want to know that your life has made a difference? Some of you remember the war in Vietnam? In the end, we left, the south fell to the north and the entire country became communist anyway. It took years before we as a nation honored the soldiers who fought there, because the whole thing seemed to be a colossal waste of life. Our world is full of stories of people who died for things that were meaningless. Some of you worked your fingers to the bone for a business or a company that discarded you when it was convenient. Some of you have been rejected by a spouse, a parent or a child that has left you wondering if your life matters. Listen to these words: “I am with you.” (Acts 18.10) “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28.20) “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” (Hebrews 13.5) Why are we tempted to love money? Is it because money is pretty? No, it is because money makes promises that it will get us protection, affection, respect, comfort and influence. But, you have that in Christ. The next verse says, “So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13.6). Think of that.

Jesus died for you and gives you his name and gives you Himself! God involves you in his plan and his plan will not fail. You may not feel like the most important person in the room, but God tends to use Corinth over Athens anyway. Know this. From the foundation of the earth God has chosen us to be his people and to be the bride for his Son. God sent Christ to come to the earth

and to secure the pardon for every single one of his own. God sent the Spirit to empower his people to go into all of the world and to tell them about Jesus because God has people all over this world. Jesus told his disciples back in John 10 that he had other sheep who were not in the fold of Israel and that he had to get them. That is what missions is. That is what church-planting is. That is what we do when we share with others the hope that we have in Christ. By telling other people about Jesus, those who are God's, will hear the voice of the shepherd and they will believe. They will come. They will come from every tribe, language and nation. They will come and there will be one flock, one shepherd and on that day what you believe now by faith will be made sight. You will see that your life, following Jesus was worth it. His plan will not fail. His plan is worth it. His plan is his plan, it helps us to be at peace, to be calm and gives us confidence to know that what we do in his name is worth it. Beloved, trust Christ and be bold in him. You are on his mission and are bullet-proof until that mission is done and then, your deployment will be over and you get to go to your eternal home, eternal rest, and eternal joy. You are on a mission. Your mission matters. Stay on mission. It will be worth it.

John 17.20-26