

Acts Chapter 18b

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[0 : 00] Okay, if you will take your scripture sheet, and by the way, welcome to the last Thursday morning for the month of April. We are grateful for your presence, and we find ourselves now in Acts chapter 19.

And as we continue to move along through the chapter, we find some very fascinating things taking place here, where Paul is engaging the local audiences.

We read in verse 9 that, well, let's back up just a little bit, verse 8.

We are on page 562 down in the corner. This is Acts chapter 19. And we read that Paul went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for the space of three months.

That means he spoke, some translations render it fearlessly, he spoke confidently, he spoke openly, he spoke with utmost confidence.

[0 : 59] And, fellas, the only way that anyone can speak boldly or with real confidence is if, first of all, they know the material they're communicating.

And, secondly, they understand how important it is. And as a result of knowing the content and the importance of the content, they know that the listeners have a vital interest in what is being communicated, even if they don't know that.

Or even if they don't believe that. There is vital interest in the content that is being communicated.

And Paul knows what he's talking about because he's been there, he's experienced the risen Christ, he got the commission from the Lord, and that enables him to just open up and let her fly.

And let the chips fall where they may. That comes from, that boldness, that confidence comes from knowing what you're talking about. And each and every one of you could speak to an issue on which you have particular knowledge, and you could do so confidently.

I've got a table of wrestlers over here, okay? Now, if I ask these guys to speak on any number of subjects, they might consider themselves kind of tongue-tied and inadequate and unable to do so.

[2 : 21] But, if I were to ask one of these guys, I want you to tell us what are some of the most important things you've learned about wrestling. They could rattle on all day long, till the cows come home.

And they could do so with confidence because they know what they're talking about. They've got a comfort with the subject, and they can express it. And it's that way with every one of you here.

If you were called upon to address a particular subject, as long as it's something that you're comfortable with, you know what you're talking about, you can express it and go on and go on.

That's exactly what Paul is doing here.

He knows what he's talking about. Dana. Question. I can see if a visitor comes to a synagogue that he's asked to speak for, you know, one week, get up and introduce yourself and see what's going on.

He's talking for three months here. I'm curious what the normal setup was for the synagogue. Was it a regular rabbi, or was it more impartial where any Jew would get up and talk about what was on his mind?

[3 : 25] Well, I cannot really address what the ancient order of service was in a Jewish synagogue, but I do know that when they met, they had a large cabinet at the back where we would consider behind the pulpit.

They would go to this cabinet and take out the scrolls, the Torah. And that is the Word of God rolled up on these scrolls. And they would unroll the scroll and read a portion.

Everybody would stand, and they would read a portion from the scroll. This is exactly what Jesus did in Luke 4. When he was there, he opened the scroll, and he read from Isaiah the prophet, and he concluded by saying, and this was an amazing thing in Luke 4, he concluded his reading of

Isaiah by saying, this day, meaning the time and day and place where he was speaking in that synagogue, reading from this scroll that had been penned over 600 years earlier by Isaiah. He read from that scroll, and then he said, this day is this writing fulfilled in your ears. You talk about a bombshell. That was a bombshell. I'm sure these people were looking at each other and saying, did you hear what he said? And that was exactly what was taking place. [4 : 54] So then, after reading from the scroll, then everybody sits down, and then the one begins to expound on what he read.

And that's exactly what Christ did. The ruler of the synagogue, which is referred to in the New Testament a number of times, the ruler of the synagogue was like the fellow who had the charge of the service and the care and maintenance of the building and all the rest of it. He was the go-to guy for anything that needed to be done in the synagogue, and he would take charge of the service, and he would turn it over to a visitor, a visiting Jew, of course, who could expound the Scriptures.

And usually they would talk about something very general from the Scriptures. But in Paul's case, what he did was virtually the same thing that Christ did when he spoke from the Scriptures. He revealed portions in the Old Testament that spoke of himself, of Christ. And Paul did the same thing. And there are numerous places throughout the Bible, particularly in the Prophets and in the Psalms, where Christ is referred to, even though it would be hundreds of years before he was born in Bethlehem.

[5 : 59] And when Paul went in and disputed in the synagogue, he would take those passages from the Old Testament, expound on them, and say, Do you know who this is? Do you know who Isaiah is talking about here when he says, He is wounded for our transgressions, He's borne our sorrows, our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.

Do you know who this is talking about? Do you know who David is actually talking about? Or Isaiah is talking about here in Isaiah 53? This is the Messiah. This was Jesus of Nazareth.

And these people in the synagogue, these fellow Jews, would say, You know what? That makes sense. That makes sense. I see the connection.

And then there would be other Jews who would say, Are you crazy? That couldn't have been Jesus of Nazareth. That doesn't fit. And they would argue among themselves, and sometimes have real knock-down, drag-out arguments.

Someone has said, Anytime you get three Jews together, you've got at least four opinions about whatever the subject. And they would have long, drawn-out arguments.

[7 : 03] They would... Has any of you ever seen on TV any of the news blurbs of the Knesset in session? The Israeli Knesset is the equivalent of our Congress.

And it's the equivalent of the British Parliament. And these guys really get into it. I mean, they get excited. They get emotionally involved. They stand up and they shake their fists at one another. And they just have some real knock-down, drag-out arguments when they've got a volatile issue going. That's what's taking place here in the synagogue. It's part of the culture, part of the tradition. The argumentation and the disagreements and the new concepts, all of these things come to the surface.

And boy, would I love to have been a fly on the wall in some of these conversations that took place. It must have been fascinating. So these people are just...

They're hearing controversial issues. If you've ever attended... If you've ever attended a synagogue service, and I have a number of them, you go on Friday night and they're very gracious and they welcome you and they know that you're a goyim, a Gentile, and you're still welcome in their service and you sit there.

[8 : 11] And the Jewish services, Sabbath services that start Friday night that I have attended have been enlightening. And I don't mean this as a put-down, but just super boring.

I mean, just super boring. Just repetition and ritual. And I suspect that this is one of the reasons that the Jews, like Christians, have such difficulty getting people in the pews.

And very often, the only time Jews go to synagogue is for a bar mitzvah or a bat mitzvah. That's when a boy or girl, Jewish boy, comes of age and is considered to be an adult, usually at about the age of 13.

And they become responsible for their own behavior. Parents and family will attend for a bar mitzvah because that's the big deal in a young person's life. Or weddings and funerals.

But other than that, Jewish synagogues are just like a lot of Christian churches. You know, we've got the Easter and Christmas crowd. And very often, a pastor, when he's greeting people and saying goodbye at the door for a Christmas service, he may be tempted to say, thank you for coming.

[9 : 31] We'll see you next Easter. And usually, that's about the only time you do. But the Jews have the same problems. But back here in the synagogue, this would be like an open discussion and people could put their two cents worth in and they would argue and harangue back and forth.

And by the way, the women never participated in this. The women were separate from the men. The women all sat in one section. All the men sat in another section. And the women would talk about talk about women things, which usually centered around the family.

And the guys talked about theology and doctrine and the scriptures and so on. So they've had some real, real discussions and arguments. And as you read, as you read the book of Acts in the very last chapter of the book of Acts, the apostle Paul is in a, he's occupying a little condo.

He's under house arrest. He is chained with a bracelet to a Roman guard 24 hours a day. But because he has not had his day in court, he is kind of presumed innocent until guilty, even though he is held in custody.

And we are told that he rented or he had his own hired villa, like a little condo, and that the Jews in Rome, and there were several Jews living in Rome at the time, they would come to Paul's condo or villa in the morning, and he would invite them in, and they would have a Bible discussion.

[11 : 12] And the text says that he reasoned with the Jews from morning till evening. This was a long, drawn-out discussion.

And all the while, they were talking about Jesus the Messiah. And the one single burning issue was, was Jesus of Nazareth the one whom Moses and the prophets said was coming hundreds of years earlier, was he the one or was he not?

Because there is no middle ground. Jesus could not be the Messiah kind of. He was or he wasn't. He would not be the Messiah if you believe he was.

And if you believe he wasn't, then he wasn't. If you believe he was, then he was. That's nonsense. There is, the philosophers call, call this the law of the excluded middle.

There is no middle ground. You have to take the conclusion he either was or he wasn't. Just like the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the law of the excluded middle applies.

[12 : 29] There is no middle ground. Either he was resurrected from the dead bodily or he was not. You may not take both positions. You may not take neither position.

You have to take one or the other. So, that became the burning issue. And you can be sure, that's what they're talking about here. And Paul's argument is, listen, not only does he fit all of what the prophets say, not only does he fulfill all of the description that they give of him, but I saw him. I witnessed him. He spoke to me. He encountered me. So now we've got a biblical perspective, and we've got a personal perspective.

Paul could say, I know this stuff is true because he appeared to me. And you all know the reputation I had regarding the followers of Jesus before I encountered him on the Damascus Road.

Listen, I was the chief persecutor of these people. I was the one who put them in jail. I was the one who held the garments when Stephen was stoned to death. And I said, give it to him.

[13 : 37] Dirty, no good, Christ lover, give it to him. And now, there's this radical reversal. Now he's devoted the rest of his life to preaching the faith that he once sought to destroy.

Some of these people are saying, yeah, well, Paul just had some kind of an emotional experience, and it's kind of driven him nuts.

You know, he's become fanatical about this, and he doesn't really know what he's saying, and he's not to be taken seriously. Well, they had all kinds of excuses for his position.

But he spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. And, perfectly legitimate question was, if Jesus was the Messiah, and if he came to establish the kingdom of God on earth, whereby he would make everything right, whereby he would fix everything that's broken, if you say Jesus was the king, where's the kingdom?

we don't see things broken, fixed. We don't see broken hearts mended. We don't see disease and death overcome. All of these things are supposed to happen when the Messiah comes.

[15 : 02] So, where are they? Good question. What's he going to say? Because he is disputing the things concerning the kingdom of God. Very legitimate question.

And, you remember, when Jesus was here, they put to him the challenge. Alright, what sign do you show us?

If you are the king of Israel, if you are the Messiah, the one sent from God, prove it. Back it up.

What are you going to do? And, Jesus created kingdom conditions everywhere he went.

That's why he gave sight to the blind. When the kingdom of heaven is established on earth, there aren't going to be any blind people. When the kingdom of heaven is established on earth, there aren't going to be any lame people.

Everybody's going to be whole. That's part of the parcel of the kingdom of heaven coming to earth. Things are going to be fixed. Justice is going to prevail. Corruption and crime is going to be stamped out.

[16:09] Well, it isn't today. And, we are saying that's because this isn't the kingdom. Some say, well, this is the kingdom. Jesus did come to bring the kingdom.

But, it's a spiritual kingdom. Well, what good is that? What is that changing? Who is that healing? Nobody I know of.

So, what we are saying and what Paul is saying is that, yes, we're talking about the kingdom of heaven come to earth. But, and fellas, this is so critical.

I hope you get this. I really hope you get this. The kingdom of heaven, which is not heaven where God dwells, but it is that kingdom brought to earth.

So, heavenly conditions will prevail on earth. This is the prayer, the model prayer. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[17:12] Fellas, this isn't it. This world is a fallen world and it is presided over by the God of this age. Satan, who is the God of this age, the God of this world, he presides over this fallen kingdom.

Jesus Christ is going to preside over a renewed kingdom, a fixed kingdom. And, he is going to have to tell these Jews, listen, the kingdom of heaven cannot and will not come to earth until and unless the chief vehicle that is going to be the spearhead for the arrival of the kingdom is in place.

And who and what will that be? That's the Jew. That's the nation of Israel. Why them? Because the promise goes all the way back to Abraham.

Abraham, chapter 12 of Genesis, I will bless those that bless thee, I will curse thee that curse thee, and through you and your seed all nations of the earth will be blessed. This is the seed of Abraham.

Abraham. And this is why this kingdom of God has never come to pass because Israel was in a rejection mode and they still are. The kingdom of heaven will come to earth and be established under the headship of Jesus Christ, the second coming, and the reason they will is because then, then, Israel will do something that their ancestors 2,000 years earlier did not do.

[18:52] And that is embrace Jesus as their Messiah. They will then. And we are told in Zechariah 12 that during the tribulation period when the Jew is being squeezed internationally all over, and by the way, we may be seeing a beginning of that right now.

more and more pressure is being put on the Jew and on the Christian. And during the tribulation period, the Antichrist is going to lump the Jew and the Christian together.

And they are both going to have a bullseye on their back during that tribulation period. So, when Israel's back is to the wall and the armies that have gathered together in the plains of Megiddo, which we refer to as Armageddon, are just about ready to march southward to Jerusalem, Jesus Christ is going to return.

And he will put his foot down on the Mount of Olives and he will move northward and the armies of the Antichrist will move southward and there will be a conflagration right before the nation or the city of Jerusalem.

And Jeremiah, or I'm sorry, Zechariah 12, I think it's verse 10, says of Israel, and they will look upon him whom they pierced and they will mourn for him.

[20:36] They will lament and repent in the stead of their ancient fathers who rejected him by saying, we will not have this man to rule over us, crucify him, crucify him.

These same people will look upon Jesus in the second coming and say, my Lord and my God, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And the armies of the Antichrist are going to be virtually liquidated. this is what is coming upon this earth. It may be a lot closer than what we know.

So this is the subject that they are talking about, all things concerning the kingdom of God. Verse 9 says, but when divers were hardened and believed not, but spoke evil of that way before the

multitude.

These are the naysayers. These are the people who stand up and shake their fist at Paul and say, you're crazy. Get out of here with this stuff. We don't believe this blow. Who are you trying to pull the wool over our eyes?

[21 : 40] This isn't true. And they would just argue and shout and scream back and forth, and Paul was right in the thick of it. But he knew what he knew, and he would not be denied.

And I wouldn't be surprised if they didn't come close to coming to blows. And it says, they spoke evil of that way before the multitude. That is, they denounced the cause.

The cause, of course, was the cause of Christ. Speaking evil of the new way before the whole congregation, they would stand up and say, you're not going to listen to this guy, are you? This is the biggest bunch of baloney that ever came down the pike.

You can't get into this. He's teaching against the law of Moses. That's what he's doing. And then somebody else would stand up and say, listen, don't be too quick to judge.

Let the man have his say. And boy, I'm thinking things were hot and heavy. Paul then departed from them and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

[22 : 40] And what that means is he called out from those people, he selected from those people, those who were into his message, those who were on his side arguing for Jesus being the Messiah.

He said, listen, I'm through with arguing with this mass. Those of you who believe what I am saying is true and want to align yourself with it, you are convinced Jesus is the Messiah.

I want you to follow me and we'll go talk where it is more peaceable and more conducive to dispensing information.

All of you who are in favor of this, you follow me. So this is where he is disputing daily in the school of Tyrannus, that is he separated the disciples, these were those who were the learners, who were open to the message, and this continued by the space of two years.

This is the longest single teaching period that Paul had in any area of his missionary endeavors.

And all they which dwelt in Asia, pardon me? Is this five years total or the two years part of the three years that he is?

[23 : 51] No, this is two years I think altogether. He spent 18 months in Corinth, which was the second longest period, and here he spent two full years.

And they that dwelt in Asia, that is Asia Minor, heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And the word just spread out everywhere. The name of Jesus of Nazareth had become a household word.

And you see, this was the big news of the day, because news traveled so slowly, but here this real news was right in the middle of them.

It was a very controversial thing, and they were talking about it all over, and the word just spread like wildfire as to what was going on when this rabbi, this former Pharisee, who used to persecute the Jews, is in town now, and he is extolling the benefits and the virtue of Jesus of Nazareth and claiming him to be the Messiah.

And verse 11 says, And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul. Why was that? I think it was principally because Paul was working through and to the Jew.

[25 : 08] And we talked last week, I think it was, about the Jews require a sign. And here, God is allowing Paul to work supernatural miracles, and these are all a wake-up call for the people of Israel.

They are designed to serve the same purpose that miracles were designed to serve when Jesus performed them, and that was to authenticate his personhood.

He proved that he was who he said he was by the miracles that he did. Remember when in John 3, Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, and Nicodemus was persuaded of one thing, and it was really significant what he said.

Nicodemus said to Jesus in John 3, we know that no man can do the miracles that you have done unless God be with him.

Now, Nicodemus had put two and two together to that extent, and his conclusion was, what Jesus is doing is humanly impossible.

[26 : 21] No question about it. God has to be behind this, because there is no way that these miracles can be done, except God be with you. And Jesus didn't say, well, thank you very much for the compliment, or I appreciate your insight.

He responded with, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. So, that was the authenticating, that was the proof positive that God was behind this.

And we've got really extraordinary wonders being done by Paul, and we are told that, verse 12, so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his body. And we read in some other translations here, Weymouth says, kerchiefs or aprons, for instance, which Paul had handled would be carried to the sick, or so that bits of linen or clothing from his body were taken to people who were ill, and the diseases departed from them.

Now, there is simply no human explanation for this. And I don't know if you are aware of it or not, but there are people today who try to capitalize on this and repeat this.

[27 : 42] And I've been a recipient of some of these things. I remember getting handkerchiefs in the mail, but if you can believe this, they were paper handkerchiefs, colored and made to look like an embroidered handkerchief.

I suspect that the real thing was probably too expensive. So they sent you this paper one, and the instructions with it were, take this, unfold it, put it on the floor, and kneel on it, and that is your supernatural point of contact.

And then, after you have prayed, fold up the handkerchief, and this is very important, fold up the handkerchief, and include a check with your most generous offering in it, and send it back to us, and that will seal your prayer before God.

And then you can expect heaven to open, and the blessings, I'll tell you, you look at that and you laugh, but you know something? You also cry, because there are really desperate, vulnerable people who look at something like that, and maybe the doctor has given them three months to live, and they say, I really doubt that this will work, but you know what?

I'll send them 20 bucks, and I've only got \$20 to lose, just on the long shot possibility that it might be valid.

[29 : 16] They know that out of so many of those thousands that they send out, there are X number of vulnerable people, and that will make it worth their while. And they use, they say, this is what God did in the Bible.

Now, if you have enough faith to believe, that's what God will do for you, because God doesn't change. And people buy into that argument, and it is tragic how many unsuspecting people are duped from this.

And the evil spirits went out of them, and that's something else that needs to be addressed a little later. We've got a really hairy situation coming up here with demonic possession, and we'll have to reserve that for our next time when we get back.

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So this is a