

## **Life in Jesus.Church**

**Sunday, October 10, 2021**

**Sermon Summary...The Trials of Paul**

**Scripture: Acts: 23:11, 24:10-25**

**Keller Sermon Series: Acts**

### **Introduction**

Acts so far has been a story of astonishing growth as Christianity changed the lives of people in many...both Jews and Gentiles ...bringing them all together into a community. But now we turn a corner...Paul faces adversity and suffering...last week he faced a mob in Jerusalem...this week he is on trial facing conviction. What stands out here is Paul's demeanor...anchored, confident, unmoving, quiet, poised. What was Paul's secret? Three things...His higher purpose, His personal promise, and a conscience that is at peace.

### **Paul's Higher Purpose (24:10-21)**

His freedom is on the line...charged with rioting, desecrating the temple and sedition. While he does explain his innocence...he decides that instead of mounting a defence, he will be a witness for Christ. Even his own trial isn't about him...it's about his call...his higher purpose.

Today...our culture leads us away from a purpose higher than ourselves. If we are the result of a random mutation of a bunch of cells, can there be anything greater than ourselves that deserves the devotion of our entire lives? If not, then it's up to us to bring our own meaning. So my wealth, my family, my happiness and status is all there is. But those things fickle...how can I stay happy and fulfilled?

The Atlantic Article: "*There is more to life than being happy!*" It says, "What sets humans apart from animals isn't the pursuit of happiness, but rather the pursuit of meaning. In a meaningful life, you use your talents to serve something you believe is larger than yourself. There is more to the good life than simply being happy." But the article ends there...with no help in finding that higher purpose. A happy life is one that works to avoid trials and pain. A meaningful life is finding something that lets you enter into hardships because there is something worthwhile.

Our culture may be seeking the answer...but this passage shows us that Paul knows there IS a higher purpose. He came by that knowledge in a strange way... he met this man on the road to Damascus...the very man he was persecuting. But that man rose from the dead...Jesus rose...and is now with the Father. There is a purpose above and beyond this world. Paul knew that...so he said to himself..."This is my chance to give testimony to what drives me...a testimony to my higher purpose."

Do we have that same connection to a higher purpose? When the trials come..so heavy that they seek to crush us...do we have that same confidence Paul demonstrated?

**Paul's Personal Promise (23:11)** *The Lord stood near and said "Take courage. As you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."*

This promise is the controlling verse that gets played out in these last chapters of Acts...Paul faces trial after trial...always guided by his higher purpose, but the Lord must have thought he needed even more, because he gave him this very personal promise to hold on to. Look at this promise...

Look at the circumstance. *"The Lord stood near Paul and said..."* Not a dream or a vision...but personal closeness. Paul wasn't alone.

Look at the content of the promise. This doesn't seem like a very good promise! The Lord didn't say..."I will protect you from suffering..." Instead, he said, "You will experience hardships and those hardships won't stop you until you have accomplished my purposes for your life. I'm not removing the trials...but I will take you through them."

Who is in control of this promise? Jesus is in control...even of the trials Paul is facing. . Who could make the promise in 23:11 except the one who is guiding all of the events. Paul understands that if he could peek behind the curtain, it's really Jesus who is orchestrating all of the hardships. Jesus is moving the pieces of every single trial.

Think what knowing that would mean to Paul each step of the way. When troubles came, Paul didn't see them as a sign that God had abandoned him, but rather, each obstacle was a confirmation that everything is happening JUST LIKE GOD SAID IT WOULD. So Paul had peace and assurance that couldn't be shaken.

But that was Paul's promise...what about us? I need that promise...my trials are heavy! But we DO have that same promise! Paul wrote Romans 8:28 about this same time all of this was happening. He wrote, *"We know that in ALL things God works for the good of those who love him...who have been called..."* Paul's promise was also a promise for all who believe! In ALL things...even our trials and troubles, God is managing to cause them to work together for our good!

### **Paul had a conscience of peace (22-26)**

Felix was afraid...yet he saw Paul's calmness while facing a trial...his deep peace. He wanted to talk with Paul about that. Paul knew a clear conscience doesn't come from keeping every detail of the law. As he did that...his conscience was so disturbed that he committed religious violence. It was Paul's experience on the road that made him realize...to have a clear conscience...you have to understand what Jesus did. Paul could be calm because he had already stood trial and been judged GUILTY in heaven's court...but then he was forgiven...set free! His conscience was clear...and ours can be the same...no earthly court really matters now because of what Jesus did for us. He was innocent...I was guilty. He was condemned...I was set free! No trial...no verdict can shake me now...I have been set free!