

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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God With Us

PART

4

TITLE

In Our Trials

SCRIPTURE

Acts 22:30-23:11



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On the mountains and in the valleys, in our highs and in our lows, God is with us.

Well, it's always good to see you Providence family. I hope you've had a really good week. I hope you have a great week upcoming to celebrate Christ and his birth and what that means for each one of us is can and should be a significant week. I want to encourage you to guard your heart, guard your time. You'll be so much more pleasant to be around and your families will enjoy so much more of your pleasantness if you've had time with the Lord.

So I encourage you in the busyness of the week and all the different things you can do to have some time when you can reflect on God's goodness and to read his word and to pray to him and ask for strength to help you, even help those who are near you to celebrate him will be worth your time. So I hope it's just a great time though. If you're new with us, we're glad that you've joined us. We're thrilled that you're a guest and if you have a Bible, I want to ask you to turn with me to Acts chapter 22 as we are in a series called God With Us.

And what we want to look at here this morning is God with us in our trials, in our trials. What we're looking through is the whole Bible, the whole story of the Bible to see how he is just relentless in his commitment to be with us and for us to be with him. So I want to pray for us as we get started. Father in heaven, I ask for your grace that you would enable us to hear your voice through your word. Would you pierce through all the darkness? Would you pierce through our unbelief, our pride? Would you pierce through the different things that would compete with our attention this morning?

I ask God for those in the room as well as for those who are at home that you would bless them and keep them and make your face to shine upon them and I pray that as we open your word, God that you would do just that, that you would give us peace, that you would give us grace, that you would give us hope in particular for those right now who are enduring a significant trial, who have just come out of one or about to go into one. I just ask for your help in their life for your assistance, for your grace, for your wisdom, and strength, and endurance in their life.

Help them to continue to hold on and hold fast to you. We thank you in the end God that our hope is not in our strength and holding on, but it's your strength and holding on to us and so remind us of these amazing truths this morning as we read your word and consider what it says to us about life. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

So this last week like many weeks in this season of life, I was watching a Hallmark movie. Not alone, mind you. I was watching it with my wife Tabitha and we enjoyed them. I'll just say it like that. We enjoyed them, sometimes for different reasons, but we enjoy them. By the way, if you're here and like Hallmark is your last thing left, it's okay. It's total comfort food. It's predictable which is why it is so good. It's also clean. So I'm not going to mess with it. Just a bit. Well, I am going to mess with it in just a little bit, okay?

So it was probably Wednesday or Thursday and as I'm watching this movie that I've never seen before, I found myself asking myself this question and it was how different would this experience be with this movie if I didn't know what was going to happen. If I just really had no clue how this was going to end. If you've never seen a Hallmark movie, I recommend it. At least one. If you've seen one, you've seen more than one. But they're all really good, right? They're clean.

But here's basically what happens, okay? If you've never seen one, you need to understand this, so you're going to understand why I'm talking about Hallmark movies. But they start where at least one person is a little unsettled with life. There's something wrong. Not everything is happening as that man or woman wants it to happen. There's something missing in the heart and they're too busy or they're engaged in something that they wish they could be doing something else.

So it begins with a felt need that everyone has and that is that my life isn't everything that I want it to be, all right? And then they have to go and they normally have to go to a small town in the northeast. It's really cozy and they have some kind of cute Christmas thing like cranberries or apples or something that's sets that little town apart and then they meet somebody and the meeting never goes well. The first meeting, it's awkward. They're rude to one another. They sin, they lie to one another.

Something happens to where it really doesn't start so good where one person who normally lives in the town, "They're like who is this guy or gal and why are they here? They should just go back to the big city," sort of a thing, right? Then what happens is the town has a need. There's always some need, right? There's some festival like they're out of trees and they need to find trees or some things they need. So this visitor serves. They find some way to help and suddenly the two people who ran into each other and they're little... Well, they're not on the same page that they're going to live their whole life together. Suddenly, they look up and they see each other and they have that look in their eye like, "Hey, at the end of this movie you're the one."

Then what happens is for about 30 minutes, they fall in love and then between 18 and 24 minutes left in the movie, there's a crisis point. There's sin or someone gets a real promotion, so they're going to go back after they've fallen in love and what are we going to do? So it ends bad and when it happens and it feels like crisis, just check how much time is left 18, 24 minutes. Five minutes later, someone has this realization that, "You know what, I don't really want to be a marketing agent in New York City. I want to grow cranberries in Vermont with this person."

They come back and then there's a little snow, there's a kiss. It ends and then there's a commercial for the next one. It's like chocolate moose Christmas. You're like, "Oh, I wonder what that one is like." And if that's going to be original and unique and it's not, and yet it'll still be really comfortable, okay?

So I'm watching and I'm thinking what if I don't know. What if I didn't know? What would this experience be like without knowing what's really going to happen in this movie? And then I asked another question and that was, "I wonder what it would feel like in life if I didn't know the story of life, the ultimate story of life, and I didn't know how it was going to end, and I didn't know that God wanted to be with me forever?"

It really made me sad to think that so many people including people who know that to be true, they don't live like it's true. We go through trials in life and we forget that the end turns out really well. There's a crisis point, but then there's love and there's hope and there's future. And that's really the story of the Bible and that's what we're doing in this series. I know it's sort of an odd series if you think about it like the text for our Christmas series is the golden calf, the fire falling from heaven at Mount Carmel and Paul is now in prison. Merry Christmas.

But the fact is, is this is where we live and this is why Christmas is so important is because Jesus Christ came into the real world to rescue us in the real world where there's real pain and where there's real trials. In the story of the Bible, it's really a beautiful story. If you know the whole thing, it begins with creation and God's saying I want you to be with me.

Then we sin against God and he says, "I still want you to be with me, so much so that I'm going to send a rescuer to bring you to be with me." Then he goes to a people. A people that really don't love him all that much and he just says, "This is who I am and this is what I'm going to do." And he says this to this people over, and over, and over again, he says, "I will be with you and I will bless you." Jesus says that time, and time, and time again. He brings that people out. He gives them a land. He gives them a law. He gives them eventually what they ask for and that is kings.

They say we want to be like all the other nations. We want our own king and he goes, "But I'm your king." And he goes, "No, but we want to be like them." And he says, "Okay. I'm going to relent. You're going to have kings." You keep reading through the stories, those kings, they're just a total disaster and yet one of them builds a temple and God says, "I'm going to put my glory, my presence in this place and you can be with me here."

Then he sends prophets, lots of prophets to his people. Prophets were like you and me. They're just people and yet God had a message for his people and he says, "Hey, I want you to go tell them this for me." One of those prophets is the name, Isaiah and he spoke a lot about this coming Messiah. In Isaiah chapter 7 verse 14, Isaiah says something. He says, "The virgin shall conceive and bear his son and they're going to call his name Emmanuel." Emmanuel means God with us. In the fullness of time, God sent his son, Jesus Christ to the earth. Jesus lived without sin and yet he went to a cross to die for our sin, my sin.

He was buried in a grave and three days later he rose from the dead. Near the end of his life he says something really interesting though to his closest followers he says, “Look, I know that you want me to stay here to be with you, but I’m going to go and I’m going to die and I’m going to rise from the dead and when I rise from the dead, I’ll be here a little bit longer and then I’m going to go to heaven and I’m going to be gone.”

They said, “No, that’s going to be bad because we want to be with you.” And he goes, “Oh, I want to be with you too, but there’s a better way.” He says, “What I’m going to do is I’m going to go to my father and I’m going to ask him and he will give you another helper to be with you forever.” And that helper is the Holy Spirit and this is so important that Jesus rose into heaven, ascended into heaven and sent his spirit down because if he didn’t, then he would be in one place, in one city, in one house on the earth and not all the rest.

In other words, if he did not go to heaven and send his Holy Spirit down, then you might be in a hospital room in Raleigh and he might be in Israel and he would not be with you. Yet, in his amazing plan, what he designed was this is that for all who would believe in Christ, who would trust him with their life, he would not only forgive him and give his righteousness, but he would fill us with his spirit so that we would be with him forever and he would be with us and he would never leave us and he would never forsake us.

You continue to read the story through and you get to a book of Acts and then eventually there’s lots of smaller letters where people who are filled with the Holy Spirit are telling people about Christ, starting churches and then going to other places who have never heard because Jesus said at the end of his life, “To those of us who are followers, now go and make disciples of all nations.” And while they’re doing this, they have an eye towards heaven because they’re waiting for Jesus to return.

At the very end of the book, he tells us what that reunion is going to be like and what heaven will be like, and this is what we find. He says in Revelation 21:3 that, “The dwelling place of God is with man and he will dwell with them and they will be his people.” He wants to be with you. In all times, what we find here in Acts 22 is he wants to be with us even in the trials. Now, this story is about a man named Paul. Paul was a deeply religious man who was committed to earning his way to be with God and therefore he was fixated on the idea of destroying Christianity. And the reason is this is that he was winning in terms of when he looked around the world and he saw other people who were trying to earn their way to God by simply being religious and being moral, he was outpacing all of them.

So when he heard the gospel that all you had to do was trust in Jesus Christ who was God, who was the messiah and he would forgive you of all of your sin and then he would take and give you his righteousness, Paul resisted that and the reason is because if you’re in a race and you’re winning, you don’t want somebody to say, “Hey, let’s get all the people in last place and put them up equal with those in first place.”

And Paul says, “No, we’re not going to do that.” So it says that he became violently opposed to the church. Well, then one day in Acts chapter 9, Christ the resurrected Christ comes and approaches Paul. He opens his eyes and suddenly he sees in Jesus Christ everything that he’s longed for. He sees righteousness. He sees the righteousness that he’s wanting to pursue with his own life and he hears him say, “I’m going to give you my righteousness. He sees in Jesus a relationship and he’s worked so hard to be with God and now all of a sudden Jesus has come to him and he says, “I want to be with you and I’m going to be with you.”

What we find after this moment in time is that for the rest of his life, his life became this painful pursuit to make Christ known and to share Jesus Christ and the good news of Christ with people we’ve never heard. From Acts chapter 13 to our text, this man Paul is persecuted in Antioch. He’s mistreated in Iconium. He’s stoned in Lystra. He’s jailed in Philippi, accused in Corinth, faced riots in Ephesus and now he’s in prison in Jerusalem nursing wounds from the previous day. The previous day, he was just in Jerusalem at the temple walking around. He wasn’t doing anything. He wasn’t preaching and suddenly the Jews who hated him, they see him, they stir up this mob and suddenly there’s this riot against him.

They start trying to beat him to death. It says they drag him out in order to beat him to death and the Roman soldiers, they run out they rescue his life. They pick him up. They bind him. They pick him up and they’re carrying them through the crowd and they’re trying to beat them while the roman soldiers are trying to get them out of the temple because they came to worship of course. And Paul says, “Hold on a second. Can you put me down? I just feel like preaching right now.” So they put him down and he begins his message and everybody’s in accord until he gets to the place and he says, “And I want you to know something and that is that God almighty and Jesus Christ, he cares also about the gentiles and not just the Jews.” And that just set them on fire.

So the Romans had to get him out of there. They put him in prison overnight and that’s where we get to our story, chapter 22, verse 30. But on the next day desiring to know the real reason why he, Paul was being accused by the Jews, he, that he, that second one, his name is Claudius. He’s the Roman commander. He unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet and he brought Paul down and set him before them. And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God and all good conscious up to this day.” And the high priest, Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall.” “Okay. Are you sitting to judge me according to the law and yet contrary to the law, you order me to be struck.” Well, those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?” And Paul said, “I didn’t know, brothers that he was the high priest for it is written you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.” Now, when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the assembly was divided for the Sadducees

say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledged them all.

Then a great clamor arose and some of the scribes of the Pharisees party stood up and contended sharply. We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him? And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, Claudius, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away among them by force and bring them into the barracks.

Now, check this out. The following night the lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you also must testify in Rome." So what do we learn here? Why is Christmas so important when you have trials? Some of you just coming out of a big trial, some of you, you're in one. Some of you don't even know about it, but you're about to go into one. What we find here is something that is prescriptive to us as believers of what it looks like to walk with Christ, to walk with him. He wants to walk with us through the Holy Spirit lives within us. But then how do we keep in step with the spirit, as Paul writes in another book.

I want to show you a few. Actually, there's five points, okay? So hold on. We're going to have to move quickly. Number one, walking with Christ will redirect the mission of your life. Walking with Christ will redirect the mission of your life. You see Paul would have been on the team of prosecutors in this trial and not the defendant if Jesus had not utterly changed his life. And that's why, we find in chapter 23 verse 1, he looks at them and the very first word out of his mouth is brothers. I want you to think about this. Some of you, you were in college, a fraternity. Maybe some of you, you were in a smaller school your whole life. You grew up with the same 20 or 30 people every class. Maybe a few kids were different but you knew every single one of those individuals.

Paul grew up with these people. He was one of these people. He would have been on this council as the prosecutor, not the defendant had Jesus not changed his life. But when Jesus changes your life, it changes all of your life. Now, all of a sudden, here he is on trial. I think it's important to just state this simply, if you don't change, you are not walking with the lord. That's what he does to people like us. He changes us. Over time, he changes us. When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, he changes us. And we continue to walk with him, he changes us.

It is definitely possible for us to be in Christ, to be saved and yet to be in a season of life where we're not changing, but that season is a season that's marked by us not walking with the Lord. It may be a week, maybe during college or where we're not changing towards being more like Christ. We may still be a believer in Christ and yet we are not changing. You know you're walking with him when you're changing, when you're becoming like him, when you're growing in knowledge, when you're growing an affection towards him, when your faith is expanding, when your character is becoming a little bit more each day, a little bit more like him.

Ephesians 2 speaks of it this way. He says, "Look, think about where we were. We were dead." He's speaking to a church. He says, "You're not dead now. We were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked." We once walked. He's talking about it like there's a nature that was dead and it had some things, some behaviors that simply aligned with that, but now all of a sudden we're not dead anymore and so we're not walking that way anymore.

He goes on, he goes, "We were all following the course of this world, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive." You see the Bible does not speak. Hear this. The Bible does not speak of us turning over a new leaf or making a decision to practice Christianity. Sometimes I hear that, "This year, I'm going to give Christianity a shot." A shot. "I'm going to try to practice it."

I understand why we say that and I think that we mean well, but you find none of those things within the scriptures. Instead, what you find in the scriptures is this idea called regeneration. Regeneration. Sometimes it's called born again. You've probably heard that. Oh, he's a Born Again Christian. It means regeneration. The idea is this is that in our sin and trespasses, the DNA and the fibers of our very soul before God, they die. They degenerate.

And that's why practicing Christianity and turning a new leaf it's not going to work. That's why Peter says, "He has caused you to be born again to a living hope." In other words, that when the gospel comes to us, we hear it and God opens our eyes and we believe in the gospel. Literally, he takes the fibers that were utterly dead and regenerates that which was degenerate. That's why you can't practice Christianity. You can't turn over a new leaf. You must be born again by trusting Christ. And when you do, you see this soul, this soul that's now alive in Christ, what happens is it redirects the priorities of our life.

Second Corinthians 5, this is what he says, he goes, "He died for all that those who live," that's us, "might no longer live for themselves." That's old man language. "But for him, who for their sake died and was raised." So let me encourage you with an application here. Let's slow down in life and consider the direction of our days. I specifically put days here instead of our lives. You could put lives there, but here's the hard thing. It's really hard to evaluate the direction of our lives because it's just so long and big. But what if you just looked at last week as a case study. Just last week. One day, seven days and you extrapolated that week out for the rest of your life that would be the direction of your life, but you maybe you could see it. This is what I did with my days.

Sometimes we're so busy, we just live our days and all of a sudden like what did I live for? So pause just for a little bit and say, "What did I do this last week?" And then ask this question. "He died for us. Was I living for him this last week? Was I living for his pleasure, for his glory, for his honor? Is his character seen in me? Am I trusting him? Am I trusting him with my life?" Walking with Christ will redirect the mission of our lives.

Second thing, walking with Christ will introduce trials into our lives. Some of us maybe this is a surprise. You may be even considering right now, "Hey, should I trust Christ? Is this something that I want to do. You're just looking at it and you hear this point, you're like, "Man, I hear a lot of other things in the world. It seems the opposite. So it can be very confusing. There's many of us in our life. At some point in time somebody told us, if you trust Jesus Christ, all your problems are going to go away.

Stress is going to go away. He's going to make you wealthy and healthy, and you can hear this any day of the week on TV, you can hear this. He's going to take away your problems. But then we have another problem. For some of us that go, "I don't believe that," I think there may still be some challenges because I mean Jesus had some challenges and Paul had some challenges and so clearly believers can have some challenges in life. But then what happens is this is that you and I, whether we like to believe it or not, we all live within our hearts. There's this merit-based system. Every one of us. That's why when you see somebody and they're a really nice guy and yet they suffer like, "Man, that's not fair."

When you see somebody who's just a jerk and it seems like they thrive in everything, they hate Jesus, they hate God, they hate righteousness and they thrive, you're like, "Man, this is not fair." It's because there's this merit-based system. We want good to happen to good people and bad to happen to bad people. So what we do is this. Even those of us who don't believe the lie from somebody else that says, "If you trust Jesus, all your problems go away," we tell ourself all the time the level of my devotion to Christ will be like levels of insurance against pain and discomfort.

That's why if you are somebody who is highly devoted to the Lord, you're like, "I'm here all the time. I'm having a quiet time. I read my Bible and yet my mom still died." Our heart can naturally absorb all that and then we find ourselves accusing God of either unfaithfulness to his insurance policy that he never signed. Or even worse, we just accuse him of not existing at all. The Bible is very clear about this in First Peter, chapter 4, verse 12. Peter says, "Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you." Jesus looked at us and he says, "Look, the students are no better than the teacher. If they persecuted me, they're going to persecute you also."

Trials are going to come. You see, when we believe the former, those lies that either the world tells us or we tell ourselves it's easy to get confused when trials inevitably come. So keep in mind this fact that Paul's devotion actually led to a harder road. He wasn't facing any of this, when he didn't believe in Christ and was not walking with him. At the end of his life he gets a sword through his neck. That wouldn't have happened. It wouldn't have happened had he ever recanted his faith in Christ.

Why then? Why do it? I mean, when you're sitting there, you're like, "Okay. So I'm not a Christian yet but I'm really considering it. What you're telling me is this, if I become a Christian, the road is going to get harder?" That's what I'm telling you. Then why would you do it? This is why. Jesus told this parable in Matthew 13 about a treasure that's hidden in the field. He says, "The kingdom of God is like a man who finds. He's in a

field and he finds treasure hidden in the field. He takes it he puts it back in.” Then he says, “And he goes and he takes everything that he has and he sells everything in joy in order to go and buy that field.”

This is Jesus’ point. Jesus is saying, “Being with me is the treasure in the field. Being near me is better than the absence of pain.” So let me encourage you to believe that with your heart that being near Jesus is better than the absence of pain. Let’s trust that. And if you do trust that, don’t take too much comfort that you’re leading the way here because you’re simply responding to something that’s already happened to you. You see in this dance of looking at somebody and saying, “You know what, it’s better to be with you, with pain than without you. You didn’t lead this dance if you go to that place. Jesus led this dance.

Hebrews 12:2 says that, “Jesus Christ, for the joy set before him, endured the cross.” You know what that means? It means Jesus says, “You know what, being with them is worth the cross. Being with them is worth it.” So when we respond in faith to Christ, what we’re saying is, “Christ, even if this following causes me to lose a friend, even if it causes me to be embarrassed, even if it causes me loss, whatever it is to be near you is better.”

The third thing I want you to see is that walking with Christ will lead us to pursue a clear conscience. Walking with Christ will lead us to pursue a clear conscience, and this is why. When you come to the place in your life where you know what it’s like to be near Jesus and you enjoy that, then you become very committed to protect that. And one of the things that hinders the relationship, it doesn’t eliminate, it just restricts it like when you’re a family or a friend like when you’re bad to one another and it’s tense, you still have a relationship, it’s just not sweet anymore.

Same thing with Christ. Our sin, a conscience that’s not clean, it interrupts that relationship. You come to the place in your life where you know how sweet that relationship is and you’ll do what it takes in order to keep that sweetness. This is what he does. You notice in verse 1 that Paul’s face was actually mirroring the innocence and the guiltlessness in his own heart. You see people who are full of shame, they look away, but not Paul. Look what he does. Looking intently at the council, he just looks them right in the face. Just looks them right in the eyes. I just love it. Then he says, “Brothers I have lived my life before God in all good conscious up to this day, because I’ve done nothing wrong.”

You’re not going to find anything. You’re going to have to make it up, if you’re going to do something to me here. Obviously, having a clean conscience doesn’t mean we’re sinless. We know that because Ananias, he hears this and he orders him to be struck and Paul calls him a whitewashed wall, right? If you’re wondering, that sounds rough. Was that an insult? Was that a underhanded Jewish compliment? No, it’s not. That’s a deep insult.

They're in Jerusalem and in Jerusalem, it's on a hill, in particular the Temple Mount. That's why they call them mount, on the mountains. So it's high. Then you go down this valley called Kidron and then it goes back up on the other side and you can see it. You can stand on the temple mount and you can look out and it goes all the way down and it goes back up. On the other side, it's the Mount of Olives. I know when I was a kid, I thought Mount of Olives, I just thought green. This tree is beautiful, it's lush. Just gorgeous.

Let me show you the Mount of Olives. It's a cemetery of whitewash walls. So here's Paul, let's check him out now. Ananias said, "Strike that man." And he says, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall." So maybe not the most loving thing Paul ever said, right? What he's saying is this. He goes, "Here you are and you're breaking the law at the very same time that you're trying to judge me against it." Basically what he says is, "What I see is there's a whole lot of beauty on the outside of your life, but a whole lot of decay on the inside."

Well, that kind of surprises everybody and like, "Dude, you're going to talk to the high priest this way." And Paul goes, "Oh, man. Sorry, my bad. I didn't know he was the high priest." I was just... I don't know. I just... Never mind. I just love to imagine. And then Paul, this is what a good conscience does though, a clean conscience. Notice what he does. Upon learning that he was the high priest, he recites scripture in order to prove his own guilt.

He goes, "You're right, my bad. I'm not supposed to say that." A chapter later he says in Acts 24:16, "I always take pains to have a clear conscience before God and man." So let me encourage us with this. Let's take pains to pursue a clear conscience. Let's take pains. Are you taking pains to pursue a clear conscience? What do you mean taking pains? That means is making decisions that sometimes are painful to keep a clear conscience.

Well, how do you do that? Well, really just for the sake of time go with two. Number one is obedience. When we see within the scripture what he wants and we know it's what he wants and we say, "I'm going to go ahead and do what he wants. I'm going to affirm him. He's lord, he's sovereign. What happens is this is that we don't sin and when we don't sin, we're not grieved in our spirit, in our conscience and therefore it remains clean.

So one of the ways we take pains is we simply obey the word. The second way that we take pains though is that when we do sin, we confess our sin. We repent of our sin. We tell others I was wrong. Would you forgive me? In order to maintain a clear conscience. This is what he does. He loves to take away our sins.

The fourth thing that I want you to see is that walking with Christ will cause us to lean on his resurrection. It will cause us to lean on his resurrection. You see when life is really hard and your eyes simply cannot discern God's movements. And that happens doesn't it? I mean, you may be there right now. There may be a family member sick. There may be something in your life and you just look and you're like, "God, this just doesn't make any sense to me. We're asking you to do something we know you have the power. Use the power. I don't see you using the power. Why aren't you using the power? Why aren't you doing it?"

Sometimes what happens, at least it happens to me, so it may happen to you also. Sometimes those kinds of things, they build up over time, these little disappointments and uncertainty of where's God and why is all this happening, and sometimes what happens is it erodes my confidence, it erodes my hope, it erodes my faith. So what do you do in that moment? What do you do in that moment when you when trials in your life, they erode what you thought was just so strong of faith and hope? You focus on the resurrection.

It's not the only thing you do, but that's the first thing you do. You notice what he says, I think is verse 6. When he says his statement, he goes, "Brother, I'm a son of a Pharisee, it is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I'm on trial." We're not exactly sure why he did this. There's certainly a hint. It sort of looks like he wants to poke a bear. He kind of looks out and he sees Sadducees. Sadducees were the elite, really powerful, really rich people and yet they thought the way to govern this kind of people who are a religious people is to be on a religious council.

So they just saw religion as the way. They didn't believe in the resurrection, they don't believe in spirits or angels, nothing. It's just calling, "Well, this is our way to lead." Then there was Pharisees. The Pharisees did believe all these things. They did believe and they were students of the Old Testament. So what you find is Paul looks out and he goes, "Hey, check this out. I bet I could poke this bear." You got a bunch of people who don't believe this. A bunch of people... It's like is that all he's doing?

I don't think so. And the reason I don't think so is because when he eventually comes, he says, "This is why I am on trial." You see the resurrection became the pivot of Paul's life and this is really important that we grasp this and understand this. You see when Paul thought that Christ was a fraud who was now in a grave, he still hated Christ. He hated the church. He hated the gospel. He hated the idea that people were being duped to believe in a man who's actually still in the grave. But when he saw with his own eyes the resurrected Christ, he began to love Christ until his own grave. To the grave and certainly beyond in heaven.

You see, Paul for everything it hinged on the resurrection. That's why in First Corinthians 15, Paul says, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you're still in your sins. You know what this means. It means no matter how sincere you are in your faith and no matter how many blessings if Christianity is simply a religion, no matter how many blessings this religion might bring to you on the earth, it is going to do you no good if he is still dead.

It's a total sham, if he's still dead. It's not worth it. I think it's verse 19 or maybe it's verse 15. I forget exactly. He says, "Look, if Jesus is still in the dead, then we who have believed in him are most to be pitied on the entire Earth because we believe such a foolish lie." Everything for Paul hinged on the fact that Jesus Christ is not dead, but he's alive. And what that means is this, the resurrection becomes the pivot point of life and faith. So let me encourage you to fortify your hope on Jesus resurrection when you're going through pain.

When your faith and hope stumble, and they will from time to time, you need to run to the resurrection. You need to remind yourself study the evidence, the overwhelming evidence that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Why? Why is that so important as opposed to something else? Why is the resurrection so pivotal, not only to Christianity and to our coming to faith in Christ. But why is it pivotal even to help us go through trials. This is why. Because if Jesus Christ rose from the dead then he has authority over all things.

And when he did rise from the dead, he not only endorsed the entire Old Testament of scripture, he also authorized the writing of the entire New Testament by giving authority to the apostles. He promised that he would never leave us or forsake us and what this does, is this is that when you come to a place within the Bible, you're like, "Do I really believe that?" That's when you go to the resurrection. And when you get the evidence in your heart that says, "I believe he rose from the dead," then you also have to believe that Elijah called fire out of heaven because Jesus endorsed the story. In other words, the resurrection changes how we read the Bible. It changes how we read our circumstances. It changes our hope and our faith during trial.

So we may be a lot of things as Christians, but the one thing we must be is resurrection people that he rose from the dead. The last thing I want you to see before we sing is this, is that walking with Christ will leave lasting memories of his presence. Walking with Christ will leave lasting memories of his presence. If you know the Lord Jesus as your savior and Lord, and if you're in a trial and you walk with him, I want you to know something's going to happen in your life. You're going to get to the other side of that trial and you are going to have etched within your heart your consciousness, the marks of his nearness.

That nearness may come from truth that you read in his word. It may come from a spirit confirming in your spirit. It may come from other people loving you, reminding you of truth. There'll be memories of him standing with you is what I'm trying to say, and that will serve you for the rest of your life. This is what we find. You see very similar, what we find in Acts 18:9. We didn't read it, but if you go back to Acts 18, you actually find that this isn't the first time that we find a verse like verse 11.

In verse 11, this is what it says. The following night, the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage for as you have spoken, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem. You're going to do the same thing in Rome." It's interesting the word take courage can also be translated be of good cheer. In other words, he was discouraged. He was beat down and tired in that prison cell. And the Lord came and he stood by him and he says, "Take courage, be of good cheer."

In this moment in time, it created a lasting memory in Paul and this is why I know that to be true because at the end of his life, Paul wanted to write one last letter. Second Timothy. In that last letter, in the last chapter, the second to the last paragraph, so these are his last words and he knows they're his last words. He knows he's already been condemned now as a criminal. It's not this trial. This is one coming.

He's literally awaiting the executioner coming to cut his head off. He knows he's going to die and that's a trial. Notice how he comforts himself in that moment. Look at what he says. At my first defense, do you know what he's talking about here? Acts 22 and 23. That's how he comforts himself when he's about to have his head cut off. No one came to stand by me. I don't know why my friends didn't show up that day. I had friends. He even lists them. In Second Timothy, he starts listing them. "I don't know why this guy wasn't there and I don't know why that guy wasn't there. Because they all deserted me." And then he says, "God have mercy on them." They may not be charged against them.

Then he says, "But let me tell you something that happened that day. The Lord stood by me and he strengthened me." Some of you know what that feels like. And what he did was he took that memory and it became the comfort now for his next trial, his last try on earth. And notice what he says next. "I was rescued from the lion's mouth and the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom."

You walk with the Lord in this trial that you're going through or maybe the next one. You're going to find that his nearness is real and that's going to serve as a memory marker for the next trial that comes. It may be a bigger more substantial one that you're going through now. I've found in my own life that there's very few things. Of all the means that God uses to stand by me in trials nothing has been more rich in my own life than his word being reminded of what I've already read and being reminded by other believers about what he has said.

So let me encourage us, as a people to devote time in our day to God's word. If you will read this book consistently, God will fill your heart with truth that will emerge as a memory when you need it most. And to help you do that, if you have a plan, you can just ignore this, but if you don't have a plan every year we put together a little Bible reading journal. This didn't fall out of heaven, okay? It's just dates and we just put a text in there. It's just a little journal. Sometimes it's helpful simply to have a plan and they're available for you in the lobby, all week at the staff office if you're not here today. It's not the only plan, but it's a plan. If you don't have one, we encourage you to pick it up and to remain, read that Bible of yours. It'll serve you for years to come, okay?

So let's pray together. Father in heaven, we love you and we need you. We pray, father for your help to help us believe. I pray for those who are here today who have yet to trust Christ. Would you incline their hearts to admit they need you, to confess their belief in you. Would you help us as a church family to walk with you even in pain and trials? I pray for those that are enduring trials, God, that your presence would be a nearness to them or that your nearness would be a refuge to them, a hope. So God, we thank you for coming. Jesus, we thank you for enduring trials and pains so that we could be with you. So we sing of your coming, we sing of your love, we sing of your glory now, and we do it with a full heart. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



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