



Many conclude that if God CAN save us from tough times, He MUST save us from tough times. But in reality, this is nowhere taught in Scripture. Instead, we are comforted by the promise of His presence in the hard places.

Matthew 5:10–12 (NET) **Blessed** are those who are **persecuted for righteousness**, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. **Blessed** are you when **people insult you and persecute you** and say all kinds of evil things about you falsely on account of me. **Rejoice and be glad** because your reward is great in heaven, for they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way.

Persecution & tough times WILL come, but that doesn't mean God doesn't care or isn't aware. All might NOT be well on earth, but it will be in heaven - in the PRESENCE of our King! Through it all we can remember the words of Jesus gave His apostles.

John 16:33 (NET) I have told you these things so that **in me you may have peace**. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but **take courage**—I have conquered the world.

Followers of Jesus are not immune to trouble or suffering, but...

BIG TRUTH: We do not FEAR, for God is NEAR.

A Word of Encouragement

Acts 23:11 (NET) ¹¹ The following night **the Lord stood near Paul** and said, "**Have courage**, for just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so **you must also testify in Rome.**"

Paul's life will not end in here. God has plans FAR BEYOND Jerusalem for Paul.

The Assassins Covenant

Acts 23:12–17 (NET) ¹² When morning came, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul. ¹³ There were more than forty of them who formed this conspiracy. ¹⁴ They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have bound ourselves with a solemn oath not to partake of anything until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ So now you and the council request the commanding officer to bring him down to you, as if you were going to determine his case by conducting a more thorough inquiry. We are ready to kill him before he comes near this place." ¹⁶ But when **the son of Paul's sister heard about the ambush**, he came and entered the barracks and told Paul.

¹⁷ Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the commanding officer, for he has something to report to him."

How is it that Paul's unidentified nephew happened to be in just the right place at just the right time to hear the plot to murder Paul? *Coincidence?* Or...is this an example of the Creator of all mankind using people He created to accomplish His will? The commanding officer listened to Paul's nephew and sent him away telling him to keep quiet about it (vv. 18-22).

God Uses People to Accomplish His Purpose

Acts 23:23-25 (NET) ²³ Then he summoned two of the centurions and said, "Make ready **two hundred soldiers** to go to Caesarea along with **seventy horsemen** and **two hundred spearmen** by nine o'clock tonight,²⁴ and provide mounts for Paul to ride so that he may be brought safely to Felix the governor."²⁵ He wrote a letter that went like this:

The **letter** explains the situation to **Governor Felix**, the man who holds the same position that Pilate held during the time of Jesus - the "Procurator" (Greek) or Governor. In order to get the letter & Paul to the governor, the commanding officer called for **two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen.**

That's **470 armed men** guarding Paul...and he's on horseback!

Paul *left more like a KING than a CRIMINAL*, while the plotting assassins experience hunger pains.¹

☀ **Kent Hughes** - *God's servants are immortal until their work is done. No servant of God dies a premature death.* ²

Paul's Journey from Jerusalem

Acts 23:31-32 (NET) ³¹ So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him to Antipatris during the night. ³² The next day they let the horsemen go on with him, and they returned to the barracks.

When Paul arrived in Caesarea, he was guarded in the palace built by King Herod the Great (v. 35). 5 days later Ananias, the high priest, and other Jewish elders who traveled from Jerusalem came to accuse Paul before Governor Felix (24:1-4).

The Complaint Against Paul

Acts 24:5 (NET) For we have found this man to be a troublemaker, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the **Nazarenes.**

Jesus was from Nazareth of Galilee - a Nazarene. Those who followed Jesus were called **Nazarenes.**

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 308.

² *Ibid.*, 306-307.

Paul's Defense

Acts 24:10-21 (NET) ¹⁰ When the governor gestured for him to speak, Paul replied, "Because I know that you have been a judge over this nation for many years, I confidently make my defense.¹¹ As you can verify for yourself, not more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹² They did not find me arguing with anyone or stirring up a crowd in the temple courts or in the synagogues or throughout the city,¹³ nor can they prove to you the things they are accusing me of doing.¹⁴ But I confess this to you, that I worship the God of our ancestors according to **the Way** (which they call a sect), believing everything that is according to the law and that is written in the prophets. ¹⁵ I have a hope in God (a hope that these men themselves accept too) that **there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.**¹⁶ This is the reason I do my best to always have a clear conscience toward God and toward people.¹⁷ After several years I came to bring to my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings,¹⁸ which I was doing when they found me in the temple, ritually purified, without a crowd or a disturbance.¹⁹ But there are some Jews from the province of Asia who should be here before you and bring charges, if they have anything against me. ²⁰ Or these men here should tell what crime they found me guilty of when I stood before the council,²¹ other than this one thing I shouted out while I stood before them: **'I am on trial before you today concerning the resurrection of the dead.'**"

Paul continues to note that JESUS the Nazarene has risen from the dead. THIS is what has changed Paul's life! And it's the reality of the risen Jesus that helps us trust **His Presence in the Hard Places.**

We do not FEAR, for God is NEAR.

Acts 24:22-24 (NET) ²² Then Felix, who understood the facts concerning the Way more accurately, adjourned their hearing, saying, "When Lysias the commanding officer comes down, I will decide your case." ²³ He ordered the centurion to guard Paul, but to let him have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from meeting his needs. ²⁴ Some days later, when Felix arrived with his wife **Drusilla**, who was **Jewish**,

Antonius Felix was the first slave in the history of the Roman Empire to become the governor of a Roman province.³ He had been set free as his brother was friends with Claudius, who later became Caesar. Josephus writes that Felix repeatedly crucified the leaders of various uprisings.⁴ The Roman historian Tacitus described Felix as "a master of cruelty."⁵

Drusilla was his third wife, and **Felix** was her second husband. Even though both were married to others, Drusilla, unusually beautiful and barely twenty at the time, became the lover and "wife" of Felix.⁶ Drusilla **was Jewish**, though she no longer had an active faith in the one God.

Now Paul has an audience before the one who could set him free. Would he dilute the truth and tell Felix & Drusilla what they WANTED to hear instead of what they NEEDED to hear?

³ Ibid., 309.

⁴ Josephus, *Wars II*, 253, 263, xii 205.

⁵ Tacitus, *Historiae* 5.9.

⁶ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 309-312.

Paul Shares the Gospel

Acts 24:24b-26 (NET) he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.²⁵ While Paul was discussing righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for now, and when I have an opportunity, I will send for you."²⁶ At the same time he was also hoping that Paul would give him money, and for this reason he sent for Paul as often as possible and talked with him.

Paul would not bribe Felix with **money**. Instead, Paul gave Felix truth about **righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment** - the very things that caused Felix to become **frightened**. If God really judges, then righteousness & self-control will demonstrate our trust or lack of trust in Him. Paul warns Felix to turn from his sin and trust Jesus.

Patient Prisoner

Acts 24:27 (NET) ²⁷ After **two years had passed**, Porcius Festus succeeded Felix, and because he wanted to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

John MacArthur notes the contrast between **Judas the betrayer** of Jesus & **Felix the Governor**.⁷

- Judas lived with the Lord Jesus for more than 3 years; Felix had Paul near for 2 years.
- Judas betrayed Jesus for money; Felix was hoping Paul would offer him a bribe.
- Judas betrayed Jesus to the Jewish authorities; Felix, fearing those same authorities, betrayed Paul by refusing to release him despite his innocence.

What are YOU waiting on? God has put people in your life to **SHARE** the truth, to **SHOW** the truth. Why do you keep stiff-arming Him?

Paul was kept in **prison** (protective custody; more likely in a room than a cell⁸), but was not allowed to leave for 2 years! Yet Paul had to cling to the promise Jesus had given him 2 years previous:

Have courage, for just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome. (Acts 23:11)

Practicing What He Preaches

Philippians 4:4-5 (NET) ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice! ⁵ Let everyone see your gentleness. **The Lord is near!**

BIG TRUTH: We do not FEAR, for God is NEAR.

⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 326.

⁸ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1-23:35*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 3347.