

# Acts 23

by Bill Gallatin

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*Jesus' faithfulness and promise to never leave us nor forsake us is the key to perseverance and overcoming discouragement.*

**Duration:** 1:04:55

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 2:3

**Topics:** "Expositional"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of guarding against complacency and having hearts that wax cold as the end times approach. Jesus predicted that iniquity would abound and that children would rise up against their parents, which is evident in the current state of society. The speaker shares a story of perseverance about a man named Ray Viola, who started as a drummer in the church and eventually became an elder and started a Bible study. The speaker emphasizes the importance of testifying and sharing the message of Jesus, as it is not about converting others but about doing our part and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in people's lives.

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## Transcript

It's evident by verse 11 that at this time in Paul's life he's tremendously discouraged, really deeply discouraged. And it can happen to a believer. I mean, even his Christian friends seem to have forsaken him.

You see no reference here from Luke that anybody's praying for Paul. It's amazing, it's almost 30 years after the resurrection and Pentecost. Peter's great preaching on the day of Pentecost and thousands coming to the knowledge of the Lord.

The Scriptures tell us that thousands of Jews were coming to the Lord and living in Jerusalem. And at the time that Paul got there, you remember they had begun, the Jews in the city, to avoid persecution from the Orthodox Jews began to compromise their faith and did not make a distinction of their Judaism. They began to incorporate some of the things.

In fact, when they had the council, you remember they didn't want to offend the Jews that believed. And so it weakened the church. And when Paul got there, they were a little afraid of Paul.

It seemed like they had heard that wherever Paul went, there seemed to be trouble. He stirred things up because he would not compromise. And when you're around a Christian that does not compromise, and if you've been around people that do kind of just, you know, shade things a little or take a shortcut or they're maybe not just what they should be, you make them a little uncomfortable.

Especially when you're with a crowd of unbelievers. It's amazing, instead of being excited to know, well, what's he going to share next? You can sense there's a believer in your midst who's a little uncomfortable, afraid what you might say in front of their aunt or their uncle or their friend. Because you're not going to, you know, shade things.

And that always creates a little bit of an uncomfortableness with people who are willing to put their faith in Christ but not go all the way. They'll deny Christ maybe a little or compromise in such a way that they don't want to raise anybody's ire or ruffle the feathers, so to speak. And so when someone like Paul is in that believer's midst, it's amazing.

The believer gets uncomfortable. Oh man, I hope he doesn't say this. Aunt Harriet's a Catholic.

Oh, I hope he doesn't say this. My dad's backslidden. Oh my gosh, he knows that my uncle drinks.

I hope he doesn't say anything about it. And they get a little fearful. And see, Paul didn't go in and play Holy Spirit and start looking for something, you know, to zero in on.

Paul just, you see, no compromise in his life. And so when he came to Jerusalem and he was in trouble, there weren't too many Christians coming to his aid. And he felt kind of alone, kind of discouraged, wondering, Lord, you know, what's going on? And you remember, that's the fellowship of suffering with Jesus Christ.

You're in good company when you feel like even your Christian friends are a little uncomfortable to be around you because you don't cut any slack. You love Jesus so much, you're just not going to play that game. You're so thankful for your redemption, for Jesus Christ taking your sin and freeing you, that there's no way you can deny your Lord.

And that's the way Paul was. And you remember, Jeremiah was that way. In fact, we'll be looking at it this Sunday in Jeremiah 15, 17.

You remember, Jeremiah was all alone. All of his townspeople, his own little town was against him in Anathoth. And he said, Lord, I have not sat in the assembly of the mockers nor rejoiced.

Yet, Lord, I know that by your hand I sit alone now and I'm filled with indignation. Lord, what's happening? And so he was hurting. It's awful to be rejected and wonder, Lord, why are you allowing this to happen? So-called believers now are uncomfortable with me, simply because I love you with all my heart.

And the Lord is mindful of that. And it could be there's somebody here tonight and you think, wow, does anybody even know, does the body of Christ even know what I'm going through? And it's interesting, Jeremiah said, Lord, I know this is by thy hand. It's by thy hand I sit alone.

Well, it's by God's hand that Paul is alone now. And he's wondering, wow, Lord, maybe I have blown it. And you can tell by what he experiences that he was greatly discouraged.

And it's interesting to me that nobody was praying for him or coming to his aid. There were no all-night prayer vigils like there were for Peter. And it's obvious to see that Peter was not as stressed and disturbed when he was in jail because he was sleeping.

Remember, he was sleeping, and they were praying for him, and the angel came and woke him up. So he wasn't awake all night churning and stressed out because, you know, just by preaching the gospel, the Lord allowed him to be put in jail. But there were people praying for him, mindful of his situation.

You don't get that with the Apostle Paul. But it's interesting to me that, again, when the prayer meeting was going on and people were concerned for Peter, the Lord sent an angel. When no one seemed to care what Paul was going through, not even his own brethren or the church, this was a serious thing.

Jesus himself came to Paul's aid. He said, I'm not going to use an angel here. He needs me.

And it's interesting to me that Paul wasn't even crying out. He was confused. He was probably deeply discouraged.

Now, there's an interesting thing that goes on in Isaiah 65, 24. As he's prophesying concerning the kingdom age, what will take place when Messiah is ruling, he said, the love of God will be there so quickly for the child of God who puts their trust in the Messiah, who, as Jesus said, before they even call, I will answer. Before they even call, I will answer their need.

While they are yet speaking, will I hear? And here's Paul. He's discouraged. He's wondering, Lord, if I've blown it, Lord, nothing seems to be going right.

Nobody cares. There's nobody praying for me. I haven't gotten any notes while I'm in jail.

No encouragement. In fact, people are avoiding me. There's another interesting text in Matthew 6, verse 8. When Jesus is teaching about prayer, he says, Your heavenly Father knoweth you have need of this before you even ask.

Because you put your faith in Jesus when it gets the most desperate. He won't even use an angel. He won't even use a prayer team.

He'll come to you himself. That's how much he's concerned. He measures the problem, and by the degree of your distress, he decides how he's going to comfort you and help you.

And here, Paul needed Jesus himself. His friends had rejected him. He felt alone, discouraged like he failed.

And so the night followed. He's created a riot. He's in trouble again.

And the night following, the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer, Paul. No condemnation. He needed to be encouraged and uplifted.

Be of good cheer, Paul. For as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. That's all Paul needed.

The Lord himself appeared to him and said, Now, you must not only testify here, and you have testified of me. That's all that was required. Do you realize that's all it requires, that God requires of you and I, that we

just testify of him? Now, there are some guys that just seems like they really know how to close the deal.

They're talking with someone for five minutes, and they've got them saying the sinner's prayer. They lead them to Christ. And they can't wait to tell you, I led three people to the Lord today.

How many did you lead to the Lord? Well, I didn't lead anybody to the Lord. When I get up to heaven, there's going to be nothing but a garbage dump waiting for me. I'm not going to have any rewards.

I'm going to have an empty sack with dust in it. And we think that we measure success the wrong way. Jesus said, If you confess me before men.

You know, it's interesting. We are actually to bring men to Jesus. There's nowhere it says that you save or you heal or I save or I heal.

All we're required to do is bring people to Jesus. He does the rest. And if he decides to save, he'll do it.

If he doesn't, he doesn't require that. He doesn't measure success by you closing the deal and having them pray the sinner's prayer or be baptized in the Holy Spirit or be healed. It's your perseverance.

It's your faithfulness in what he's asked you to do. And what do you say to Paul? There's been nothing but riots. There's people been rejecting him.

And he said, Paul, you've testified of me. Be of good cheer. I'm pleased.

That's all he requires. He asks you to confess him before men, not to deny him. Just to persevere.

To share what you do know. I remember one time when I was very young in the Lord. And at that age, because of my zeal and my love for Jesus Christ, I did many, many rash, impulsive things.

Now, I pray a little bit before I do a rash, impulsive thing. But I'll never forget that we had a financial need. And I was really loving, walking by faith.

I took from one of my personal verses to take no anxious thought for tomorrow what I will eat or drink or wear ever. And I never have. I live from day to day, and I refuse to be concerned about it.

Now, that created stress for Rosemary. Because there were times when the utilities and the house payment was due, and I'd put my whole paycheck in the offering bag. Because I just knew God was going to some way do it.

I took him for his word, that I need not take God. I could take his word for what it meant. And the funny thing is, he always did do it.

And Rosemary learned that also, as she saw it. It was very stressful. One time we were in church, and I'll never forget.

And we had some bills to pay. And the amazing thing is, the bag came by in the tent. We were in a tent in those days.

And I reached in, and I had a dollar in this hand, and she was looking at me. And I had my paycheck in this hand, and I put the paycheck in the bag. And she tried to reach in there and grab it.

You used the wrong hand, you know. And off the paycheck went. And he was so faithful.

And it's amazing how he taught us through that. And it's been my life. I've just lived that way.

And God's been faithful. And I've learned that you cannot give God. He will never be indebted to you.

And I remember one time that we had another financial need. The tuition for both my boys in Calvary's Christian school was due. And I think the rent was due.

And I was working as a carpenter. And there happened to be a Baptist church that was really attacking Calvary Chapel. It was jealous of Calvary Chapel.

Because it just saw these ragamuffin kids with long hair and bare feet and raggedy dungarees. And, you know, going to church and just crowds and a lot of joy. And the worship was different.

And so they found fault with everything. And here, this church, you know, they were the frozen chosen, man. They were dead right about everything.

And they were so cold you had to wear a fur coat in July in that joint. But the interesting thing is one of their bus drivers drove around the edge of the building and caught it with the top of the bus and tore the corner of the roof off. And they couldn't get anybody in their own church to fix it.

And I got wind of it. And they needed a carpenter. And they were willing to pay.

And so I thought, well, praise the Lord. It's a chance to, you know, meet the needs, pay the bills. And so off I go and I spend a couple days working on their church, this Baptist church, and fix the roof and everything.

And it came time to walk in and give them the bill. And I thought, I can't charge Jesus for fixing this house. And so I turned around and walked out.

And I had a beard and long hair. And they were ready to write the check. And I said, no, you know what, I just can't charge Jesus.

This is his house and you're his people. And I just love Jesus too much. I'm not going to give you a bill.

And I turned around and walked out and came home. Well, it created a little stress. And we went to a home, a Bible study.

And one of the board members that we knew, that we were friends with, had a Bible study in her home. And at that time, a pastor was teaching in there. And he came from a background of responsibility.

And he was old in the Lord. And I'll never forget, that night he got wind of it. And he was kind of a Pentecostal type guy and everything, a little noisy.

And he rebuked me in front of the whole Bible study. He said I was a lousy, no good bum, worse than an infidel, that I didn't take that money and I wasn't providing for my wife. And he laid me out.

And I was crushed. And I'll never forget, after the Bible study, I went home and I couldn't even sleep. I was on the couch weeping and sobbing.

Weeping and sobbing. I said, Lord, I know my heart was right. But I respected this older pastor because he was my elder.

He was an older guy in the Lord. And I thought, but Lord, you know my heart. And I was weeping and crying and I couldn't sleep.

About 3 o'clock in the morning, the Lord spoke to my heart and encouraged that, I know, you did this as a gift unto me, and I receive it. And he spoke to me so clearly and so beautifully. I went to bed and slept like a baby.

And you should see what the Lord did for us financially. I think he paid, at that point, I think he paid several months in advance, both boys, tuition. We got a phone call from the church.

And one of the secretaries said, Rosemary, someone just, the Lord's just taking care of both boys' tuition for six months or something. And next thing we know, there's, you know, money just more than we needed to meet our needs. Now, I didn't live like that forever.

But I'll never forget, I was weeping and so brokenhearted and just thinking, I blew it, I'm just no good. And he said so. But the Lord came to me in the middle of the night on the couch.

He spoke to me. He says, I know you did it for me. I know you did it for me.

And so here's Paul. You know, he's all alone, discouraged. Far more discouraged than Peter.

So the Lord says, no, he needs more than an angel. I'm going to him personally. Now, let me tell you this.

If you love Jesus Christ with all of your heart, and because of your love for Jesus, people are getting a little uncomfortable with you. And you're feeling a little alone. Don't be discouraged because Jesus knows.

Maybe people reject you, and maybe even the body of Christ seems to be indifferent to your need right now. Remember, the body of Christ doesn't meet the needs Jesus does. The church doesn't meet the needs Jesus does.

And if he knows that you're desperate, and you're at that point, believe me, he is faithful. Before they even call, I will answer. While they are yet speaking, I will hear.

He will be there for you. But don't you be discouraged. And never doubt the Lord.

He said, lo, you can be content with the things that you have, for it is a faithful saying, he will never leave you nor forsake you. Never. It's interesting, now, three years later, Paul never again had a question about anything.

Never discouraged again. And it's amazing what he goes through the last three years of his life. As he goes down to Caesarea, put in jail again for two more years before he goes to Rome.

But he got to Rome. He knew, he said, I'm going to Rome. I know it.

God told me I'm getting to Rome. So no matter what I'm going through right now, God says, I'm going to finish my course. And that's the one thing he realized when the Lord appeared to him.

You see, we sometimes think that when God directs us a certain way, that there's going to be no problems, no difficulties on the way. That I don't have to learn anything on the way. That I don't have to learn to trust Him more on the way.

That I don't have to realize how faithful He is on the way. He's been faithful up to this time, but I need to realize even in a deeper way, maybe. You remember in Mark chapter 6, the lesson the apostles had to learn.

The Lord had just performed the miracles, and it says, and He constrained them to get into the boat, and He said, now go to the other side. Now, if He said, go to the other side, that meant they're going to get there. He didn't say, go halfway through and hit a storm and panic and sink and die.

Because halfway through on the way to the other side, they did hit a storm, and they almost did sink, but they didn't. He knew they wouldn't, but they didn't expect the storm in being obedient. And they forgot that He said, you're going to the other side.

Now, Jesus has said through the Gospels and through the preaching and through all the letters of the apostles, that when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you're going to get there. He's going to finish and complete that good work He's begun in your life. No matter what you're experiencing right now, whatever the storm is, whatever the thing, everybody seems to be neglecting your life, or you don't know what's going on in your life.

Does anybody know? Does anybody care? Jesus does, and He's going to make sure you make it. You need to keep your eyes on Him and get your eyes back on Him. He said, I give you eternal life when you put your trust in Me.

Not temporary life or eternal life for the next five years. He said, I will be with you always, even unto the end. Now, some of you might be in that area right now where the apostles were.

You're in a storm. You think you're going to sink. And you're wondering, Lord, are you real? Are you there? Will you be there for me? Yes, He will.

He'll never tempt you beyond reason or beyond your means or capabilities. That's another promise. Now, you say, well, I believe that.

No, you don't. I didn't either. We don't until we are in that situation and we realize that He is faithful.

We mentally accept it and say, I believe that He'll never tempt me beyond means, and He'll never leave me nor forsake me. And yet, we will only believe it to a point. So God says, I'm going to increase your faith.

I'm going to prove myself more faithful. So He puts us in a situation, and it's amazing what we think. Lord, the Lord has forsaken me.

It's not real. I'm not going to make it. We catch ourselves thinking, I'm not going to make it.

And so the Lord comes to you and proves to you. Again, that He will never leave you nor forsake you. That He's going to be with you and see you through whatever, until you're with Him on the other side.

He was with Paul, and Paul got to Rome. Now, Paul didn't get to Rome the way he thought. He could not conceive the way God designed his route to Rome.

I would imagine, and I shared this before, Paul was so overwhelmed and grateful for his salvation, and when he began to serve Christ in the beginning, he said, Lord, all I want to do is bring glory to You, yield to You, and serve You. I'm Your servant. And he could not conceive how God would design things for his life to bring glory to him.

Maybe the first time Paul prayed for someone and they got healed, he was convinced, I have a healing ministry. I'll never have trials again. God will send me places and I'll have meetings, and people will come forward after I teach the Bible, and I'll pray for people and they'll get healed.

Because he prayed for someone and they got healed the first time. No, he didn't have a healing ministry. And miracles took place in his life, but not always.

It's interesting. Again, we're going to find out the Lord appeared to Paul far greater than sending an angel. The Lord Himself appeared to Paul.

But it's interesting. Paul had to make rational choices and decisions and think clearly, and God used means to deliver him out of his desperate situation, where with Peter, He used the supernatural. So you can never figure or understand or know or predict how God's going to work things out for you.

So you have to rest and trust and keep your mind stayed upon Him and trust. He may work something out supernaturally. He may do something that you can't.

Man, it was just impossible to conceive that way. Or He may have you make a wise decision, and He begins to open doors, and then He brings someone else into that decision and works with you, and He meets the needs that way. So He was greatly encouraged.

And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under a curse or a vow, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now in Judaism in that day, the Jews interpreted the law that if someone was a threat to Judaism or maybe the moral code of the land or a threat to society, the rabbis and the Pharisees thought you could murder someone. In fact, God Himself had people assassinated in the Old Testament by people.

God would direct people to assassinate people that were dangerous. And so the Jews, they would take a curse. They would take this vow, and it was called the kereth.

And if they did not put someone to death, they would put themselves under the death. They would say, God, curse me, kill me, if I do not bring this thing to pass. I'm making a vow, and they're never going to eat or drink again.

That's the hatred that the Jews had for Paul because he left their religion. He was leading people to the Messiah, who they didn't accept. Now the Greek for that word is anathema, let them be accursed.

In fact, Paul used that term for false prophets. Let them be accursed if they teach falsely. And so they've made this vow, brought themselves under the curse that if they did not kill Paul, God, you kill me, we're not going to eat nor drink until he's dead.

Well, it's interesting. You wonder if they really meant it, how godly they really were in their orthodoxy because Paul lived. You wonder how many of them starved themselves to death.

You wonder who really meant it. It's easy to make a vow, to make some statement and then have things work out opposite and then just forget the vow we made, kind of blow it off. You wonder how many of them really died and kept the vow in their life.

Now, it's interesting. Remember Judges chapter 11? Jephthah, the deliverer that God raised up. You remember he was the son of a harlot and so he was rejected and kind of set aside.

His people wanted nothing to do with him, but he was a powerful man. And here God was going to use him to deliver the Israelites from the Ammonites. And so they went to Jephthah and he called out to God and he said, Lord, if you will give me victory over the Ammonites, the very first thing that comes out of my home, I make a vow.

I'll offer it up as a burnt offering unto you. And to show you how powerful vows were, his daughter walked out and he had to keep that vow. To offer up perpetually in virginity and it broke her heart.

Some Bible scholars actually feel that because of his vow he actually burned her alive. He put her to death because he made the vow. But he kept the vow.

He had to. And so these Jews made this kind of a vow. They brought themselves under the curse or the curse.

If they didn't bring it off and they wanted to be cursed by God, they would starve themselves to death. And there were more than 40 which had made this conspiracy. Now you know why when Jesus speaks of the synagogue after Christianity has been formed, it's referred to as the synagogue of Satan.

Because you see, you go to a normal synagogue, you go to the rabbis in Israel today and they hate the name of Jesus. In fact, I've been around Muslims and had discussions on the Temple Mount with Muslims that have a higher regard for Jesus Christ than the Jews. They have rejected their Messiah.

And so you see the Holy Spirit doesn't work in Judaism. The Holy Spirit is not working in those synagogues in Israel. And so it's referred to as the synagogue of Satan.

Jesus himself uses that term. And so you can see why it would be very easy for these Orthodox, godly, Bible-believing, Old Testament-believing Jews to take a vow to kill a Christian. And Paul's feeling all that.

Feeling that hatred, that rejection, and yet not cutting corners to survive. Rejected by his own family, friends, the church. His love for Christ constrained him.

Sure, he was discouraged. Sure, there's honest doubt. But the Lord will never let you go beyond the means.

He will come to you to encourage you. Oh, how he loves faithfulness. How he rewards faithfulness.

And we just hurt ourselves when we begin to deny the Lord to survive. When we begin to try to survive and not deny ourselves and go all the way to Jesus Christ, we just hurt ourselves. But oh, when we are faithful to him.

Rather lose every human friend on earth than the fellowship with Jesus. No matter who it is. And so they came to the chief priests and elders and said, We've bound ourselves under a great curse.

And we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore, ye with the council, signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow as though you would inquire something more perfectly concerning him. And we, wherever he come near, are ready to kill him.

Now notice how Paul delivers here. Here again, by just using the brain that he gives us. So often, if we are maybe saved or get caught up under the wrong movement, we think that, man, the only way God can be glorified, it has to be a miracle.

And so sometimes we just sit and do nothing and call that faith, waiting for God to work supernaturally. And another year goes by, and nothing is being done in my life. Or things don't get any better.

I've prayed, and I've prayed once, and it's by faith, and God is going to do it. Simply because maybe God worked supernaturally one time before, we think that's the only way he works that he can be glorified. Hey, wait a minute.

No, he gave us the brain. He's given us the mind of Christ. Think.

He's given us the gifts of the Spirit to discern, to have the word of wisdom, to have the word of knowledge, and to make decisions, to commit our ways unto him, and to search the word of God, and to direct our steps by the word of God. And if we get to a point where means doesn't work, God has the supernatural means from his side. In this particular case, and Paul has seen the supernatural.

Here's the man who was so busy working, and he wanted to be a good witness. He wouldn't beg for money that he would send his sweat bands rather than quit work, and it would trigger people's faith, and they were healed, and he was even there. He could call blindness on people.

He knows the supernatural. He's seen the earthquake come in Philippi. He could have walked away when God supernaturally just shook the earth and destroyed the jail around him.

In this particular case, notice how God works. And here's the balance of the spiritual man. Here's the maturity to know, I know this is God.

Paul didn't say, well, he did it supernaturally last time. This is the Lord. I'm just going to wait until the angel appears.

He did it for Peter. Well, I don't need to go to a doctor. I know so-and-so, and he had the same thing, and he got prayed for, and God healed him supernaturally, and I'm going to just pump up the faith, and I'm not going to go to a doctor, and you might die.

I'm going to throw the medicine away. So-and-so just quit taking their medicine, and they're better. Yes, but God told them and God led them.

They knew in their heart that they could do it. They didn't do it foolishly, impulsively. So don't you do it that way.

You take the medicine until God relieves you, until God lets you know in your heart it's not necessary anymore, and he will, because it's all God working, and there's the balance, the supernatural and the

natural, God working it all, because we're still in a natural state. We're still in our human bodies. We're still functioning.

So when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle and told Paul, here's nephew, overhear something. It doesn't say how, but we do know this, that you can be sure that God controlled circumstances to have the nephew somewhere to hear the plot, or maybe the nephew knew someone involved in the plot, and so he said, Uncle Paul, they're plotting to kill Uncle Paul. And so he goes to Paul, and Paul called one of the centurions unto him and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain, for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

It's interesting, Paul didn't feel led to pray. He didn't see it as an automatic thing to pray and say, Lord, my life's on the line, send an angel. I know, Lord, you can do it.

He just started thinking quickly, making decisions, trusting in the Lord, as the Lord gave him direction. So he took him and brought him to the chief captain, and he said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand and went with him aside privately and asked him, What is that that thou hast to tell me? And he said, Well, the Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldst bring down Paul to-morrow unto the council.

That would be the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, as though they would inquire somewhat of them more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them, for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now are they ready, looking for a promise from me.

So they're trying to get the Roman centurion to go along with it. Now remember, Roman law was very just. And the law said, if that Roman centurion allowed something to happen to Paul unjustly, because Paul was a freed man, a citizen of Rome, you see, the Roman centurion would have been put to death.

And he knew that, so he couldn't buy into that. And so the chief captain then let the young man depart and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me. So right away he said, Wait a minute, I've got to protect this guy.

And here again, here's the sovereignty of God. Now first of all, Satan tried to kill Paul before he even got to Jerusalem. He couldn't do it that way.

Now here's how you learn the wiles of Satan. How quickly, like a serpent, he can go from one person to another quickly. And it's hard to keep track of him if you're not aware of these things.

He tries to kill Paul before he gets to Jerusalem. He tries to kill him with Roman authorities. He can't do it that way.

Then he tries to kill him with his Jewish brethren. He can't do it that way. So immediately he goes back.

He tries to kill him again with Roman law to get the Roman soldier to get involved in it. He goes to Jews. He goes to Gentiles.

He's slithering around trying to get somebody to work to get rid of this Paul. And what does God do? He uses the very agents and the very government that's controlling the world, the very government that Satan

established to keep Jesus from coming, the very government that put Herod in position to kill all the babies when Jesus was born. Rome.

He uses Roman authority to protect his apostle. And he thumbs his nose at the devil. The very instruments that Paul would have been put to death with by Satan if he could have gotten away with it, God turns it around and says, hey, this Roman centurion, he's going to put 470 troops or soldiers with Paul to protect him, to get him to Caesarea.

The church didn't do anything to help him. His Jewish brethren didn't do anything to help him. Why? Because Satan had them frightened.

And Satan couldn't even get Rome to kill him. God uses Rome to protect him. And again, you see, when you look at your own life, if you are faithful to Jesus, there's nothing that can touch you or harm you.

Nothing. No matter what Satan tries to do, God will work it to the good for you. He'll use the government.

He'll use that anti-Christ government, just like He used Rome, to protect you, to show you favor, to encourage you, to assure you that you will get to your destination. Now look. So He called unto Him two centurions.

He said, make ready 200 soldiers. Paul couldn't even have done that. He couldn't have hired that many.

He didn't have the money to do that. Can you see Paul, a Christian and a Jew, going to Rome and Caesarea? I have a very important dangerous journey to go to Caesarea. I want you to guard me all the way down there.

Get out of here, you Jew. Who are you? But see, God's behind the scenes. And God creates the circumstance by the hatred, the rejection, the riot, the turmoil, that on the surface looks like everything is going wrong.

But it's playing right into the hands of God to give Paul a safe journey to Caesarea to guarantee him safety. And God's behind the scenes. Even though hateful men are making decisions, God's controlling it.

And there may be people making hateful decisions against you right now. You can be sure God is controlling it and He will work it to the good for you. Always.

He just asks you to trust, to persevere, to testify. That's all He asks you to do. Testify.

Do not deny Him. Remember the Philadelphia church? The church that was promised the escape of the tribulation? Why? Because thou hast a little faith. You have not denied my name.

I will keep thee from. This thing is going to come upon the whole earth. This hour of testing.

Because thou hast not denied my name. I have put before thee an open door that no man can shut. Whether it's an antichrist government that rules the world, rules your country, that's changing the constitution to limit your freedom, they can't shut the door at the rapture.

They can't stop you from getting to your destination. Because God's on your side. And if God be for you, Paul said, who can be against you? You see, there's nothing impossible for God.

So he says, get 200 soldiers to go to Caesarea. And horsemen, three score and ten. Seventy men on cavalry.

And 200 spearmen at the third hour of the night. So he's going to move them down to Caesarea with 470 elite troops. The Roman marines and cavalry.

Personal bodyguard for one guy. Now, it's about 65 to 70 miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea as they go down through the hills of Judea to the first place where they went and sent some of the troops back full of gorges and ravines. It's beautiful.

It's on the Mediterranean side of the hills of Judea, the mountain range there. And it's really green and thick and foresty. The Jews had tremendous battles on that side when they won their independence from Jordan in the 1948 war.

And you can see some of the burned out tanks and armored cars they've left as monuments on the way to the airport from Jerusalem on the main highway in that area. But it's a tremendous area for ambush. And the Roman centurion knew that until they got down to the plains of Ashdod in that last 35 miles of Caesarea where it was open and they couldn't be trapped or ambushed.

And so to make sure Paul would be safe, he sends 470 men the first 35 miles from Jerusalem at 9 o'clock at night. Right away. He said, Provide them beasts that they may set Paul on and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

And he wrote a letter after this matter. Now Felix is an interesting guy. He was, in the history of the Roman Empire, he's the very first freed slave that became a governor of a Roman province.

The very first one. And Tacitus, the Roman historian, said, He ruled with the prerogative of a king but the cruelty and the mercenary of a slave. Because he was once a slave.

He was very cruel and unmerciful. But he was a mercenary. Now the reason he got elected and was given this authority in the Roman province, when he was a young slave, he and his brother Pallas were friends with Claudius Caesar.

Growing up together. As slave boys, they played with the Roman Emperor. Probably his parents were slaves in Claudius the Emperor's family's home.

Rich Romans. And as they grew up together, they became close friends. When Claudius became the Emperor of Rome, he made Pallas his favorite in his government and he allowed Felix to become a governor in one of the provinces and for a while he ruled in Samaria.

And then at this particular time, two years previous he was in Samaria, at this time he was the pro-council or the governor of Caesarea at the time. And so this is who Paul is being sent to. He was so cruel and mercenary he was replaced when Nero came into power.

But this is the very first person who Paul is going to testify before as he's headed toward the Roman government to reach the most powerful man on earth, the Caesar. He starts with his governor. And again, you see, Satan would do everything he could to stop this.

Not only has Paul been, you know, able to reach the Jews and all the surrounding area, you know, Judea, Samaria, the other most parts of the world now, and now he's on his way to Rome, the capital of the world,

to the Caesar, but under the protection of God. Here Satan's controlling the Roman government, he believes. Satan's the one who's designed Caesar, the God-man on earth.

That's what August means, the Augustus one, or the August one, the God-man. And so he's claiming to be God on earth, ruling the world. And here God is sending his man to proclaim who the real God is, Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified and risen, who's coming back again.

God's ruling. God rules all the affairs of man in his sovereignty, and that gives tremendous rest and peace to the believer who understands that no matter what seems to be going wrong right now, no matter what the storm of your life is, how isolated you may feel, don't you get angry at other Christians because they don't understand or they seem to neglect you, or you feel all alone. God is designing it.

Remember, Jeremiah said, Lord, I am alone by your hand. It's by your hand. And yes, he was filled with indignation.

That was God's plan. And God didn't forsake him, and God won't forsake you. And you will get to the other side.

No matter what the hindrance is right now, the storm or the confusion or the dark of night in your soul or your life and circumstances, God is controlling. He's ruling. And maybe you need to return to Him in your trust.

You've doubted Him. That's what happened to Jeremiah. We're going to learn Sunday that he had begun to believe the lies of his own mind and his friends, and he was wondering, is it worth it? Is it worth it to stay this close to Jesus Christ? Is it worth it to stay faithful and lose friends? Yes, it is.

I don't miss one friend I've lost because of Jesus. He is more than made up for their relationship in my life. It was kind of sad and frightening and kind of heartbreaking when it first took place, but Jesus has more than filled the void with His faithfulness and His love.

And I've discovered I don't miss Him at all because I've got more of Jesus. I know Him more. I love Him more, and I know He loves me more.

Don't ever be afraid of that. You see, there's the weakness of the church. That was what was happening.

That's why there was no church to really go to the aid of Paul. Everybody was afraid to make a stand. They'd begun to compromise so much to survive that when it came right down to it, they were afraid to make a stand for somebody.

And so, the chief captain writes a letter to Felix. And notice how he tries to promote himself. He kind of exaggerates a little bit.

Claudius Lysias, under the most excellent governor Felix, sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews and should have been killed of them. Then came I with an army and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

It wasn't exactly like that. He's trying to save his own life. There's a riot going on, and he's ready to beat them half to death, and he finds out he's a Roman citizen.

He almost made a mistake. And he's trying to save his own skin. He really didn't care about Paul too much.

But he realized he was a Roman citizen. But he's making it seem like, man, I came to the rescue. And notice how many times he says, I. And when I would have known the cause whereof they accused him, I brought him forth into their counsel, whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

And when it was told me how that the Jews laid weight for the men, I sent straightway to thee. Boy, I'm a great guy, aren't I? You know, Felix, if you're ever looking to promote someone, I'm the one, you know. I've been faithful here in Jerusalem.

I'm the guy that did it all. Aren't you glad I prayed for you? So-and-so was having trouble, and I lent them the money. I'm the one who helped them.

Careful. Promotion cometh neither from the east, the west, or the south. I've watched people try to promote themselves by the way they relate the events that they've been involved in, and it just hinders.

A little exaggeration here. Too much emphasis on me, my prayer, or what I did to help them get to Jesus. And it's very, after a while, you watch it and you say, you know, they're just delaying what God wants to do in their life.

They're still touching the glory. They like self-promotion. They like to hear their name mentioned.

They're just adding a little bit too much to the story. Getting too much of themselves in there instead of just the Lord. The Lord.

You don't have to remind somebody that you lent the money. I don't have to remind them that I prayed for them. The Lord just healed them.

Isn't that wonderful? The Lord met their needs. Isn't that wonderful? No one needs to know how. When you see what happens, we just lose our future reward.

We've gotten the praise. We've gone after a little bit of praise. Well, we've got it.

Jesus said, you've got your reward. You want praise from man? He'll let you get away with it, but when you're up there, see, there's nothing. He said, do things in secret, and your Father, which is in heaven, is the reward of the open.

You need to pat on the back. Down here, you'll get it, but you won't get one up there where it really counts. Jesus said, you've already got your reward.

You're going after the praise of man. You want to see your name printed somewhere or a picture in a paper or a book and hear your name? Okay, I'll let it happen, but you're not going to get it from me when you get up there where it counts. Remember, John said, he must increase, I must decrease.

Well, I perceived that he's accused the questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid in wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

He writes this real glowing report. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, brought him by night to Antipatris, which is about 35 miles from Jerusalem. That's that dangerous area where all the hills and the forests are as you leave Jerusalem today and go down to Lod and Joppa and Tel Aviv where the airport is.

Beautiful, beautiful area. Very dangerous. On the morrow, they left the horsemen to go with him and return to the castle.

So as the sun came up the next day, it was safe as they're going into the plains of Sharon down toward the coast to Caesarea where it's all flat, where there could be no ambushes. They knew that he didn't need all the men, so he sent some of them back to Jerusalem. And so when they came to Caesarea and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia, which was Paul's home province in Turkey. We'll be going up near that area this year, by the way.

We go to Ephesus. I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commended him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

And it's interesting, last year when we were in Caesarea, they have begun excavation along the beach of Caesarea, a whole new area along the shore. And they've uncovered a whole new area of the government buildings. And they believe they found the very place where they took Paul, the judgment hall.

And so they've got it, they had it all cordoned off, but you could see the tile floor and we all got to look at it. So they might have more of it uncovered this year when we go and visit. But that's where they're going to take him, to the judgment hall.

And now Paul, under the protection of the Lord, was sent to Caesarea. He's going to be there for about two years. He's going to do nothing but give his testimony and preach the gospel to the most important people in Jerusalem and in Rome.

Going back and forth by sea, by ships, the main port, Caesarea. See, again, what Satan means for evil, God turns it around and means it for good. He works it to the good and the gospel just gets spread to more important people.

Now, these are individuals that Paul would never be able to meet on his own. You see. But as a prisoner, as one who's a criminal of the state or something, he's brought into an area where important people are meeting him now.

He's got to defend himself. And God's going to use that. Before it's over, people in Caesar's household get saved.

It's amazing. And again, God's the one who does it. Remember that.

All He wants you to do is take people to Jesus. Just testify. Introduce Jesus.

That's it. He does the rest. He doesn't reward you on whether they said the sinner's prayer with you or whether they're converted.

It's just, do you testify? Are you sharing? That's all He asks you to do. He'll let someone else close the deal. He's got it all designed.

Now, the problem is, you see, the guy that closes the deal goes around boasting, like, I let someone lord it. He doesn't realize that maybe God's been conditioning the guy for 14 years through other people's testifying. Circumstances.

Little coincidences. Watching a television program. Hearing a radio station.

Meeting a lost friend or an old friend that's born again. And all these things are, you know, adding up in the person's heart as though the day's here and all of a sudden, the guy walks up and says, shares Christ for all, and that's it. He just can't take anymore.

He says, man, there's too many coincidences that have been going on for years. I'm ready. And then the guy goes around and he boasts like he did it all.

All he did is close the deal. The Holy Spirit had been working in that person's life for years. And you see, some of the most powerful, important people or influential people right now are who you're going to meet maybe tomorrow or next week.

They don't even know what God's going to do in their lives yet, but it's important that you testify and do your part because that's the reward. Paul, you've testified of me in Rome. Paul didn't have success.

He didn't lead anybody to the Lord. He didn't start a whole Bible study. He tore the town apart.

Started another riot. His sixth riot. And the Lord says, be of good cheer.

You've testified of me. Let me give you a story about perseverance since I've been here. A young guy showed up at the depot some 16, 17, 18 years ago.

Just full of zeal. This long, black hair. Played the drums.

Skinnier than the drumstick he used. Name was Ray Viola. And man, could he play the drums.

And he loved Jesus. Next thing you know, you just can't get him out of the church. You just can't get rid of him.

He's just in love with Jesus. He and the kids were real little. He and Liz.

And some of the things we got involved with together, he was one of the first music group we ever had. He was the drummer. Next thing you know, he's teaching a home Bible study.

Next thing you know, he's an elder. He's involved in a Sunday school. Next thing you know, we move over here and he's here for just a few months.

And the Bible study he was teaching up in the city, they decide, you know, why don't you just stay up in the city. And so they start meeting in a pizza hut. Did I share this last week? Well, you know, with a name like Viola, you gotta start in a pizza hut.

So they're meeting in a pizza hut. And they started out, they had about 25, 30 people. Another year went by.

25, 30 people. Another year went by. And just year after year, no growth whatsoever.

He'd call on the phone. He said, Pastor Bill, I just, you know, maybe I'm not called to be a senior pastor. Maybe I ought to pray.

Maybe I ought to just maybe get together with Jeff. And Jeff Breed had gone up and started a home Bible study in a certain area. And the people were coming out or didn't have to come out anymore.

And so Jeff Breed started his study. And I said, well, we'll pray about it. And so they'd pray and nothing seemed to work.

And Ray was willing to go be the assistant pastor with Jeff. Jeff was willing to go be the assistant pastor with Ray. They just combined.

And Ray just wasn't growing. I said, no, just, maybe it's time to move. He said, well, where will I move to? I don't know.

Just start praying. Or we'll open something up. Next thing you know, they moved to this convent.

It used to be a convent up on Winton Road, I think it was. And it's about eight or 10 years later, still, nothing happening. Pastor Bill, I don't know.

Maybe I'm just supposed to just cash it in and everybody just go over to Jeff Breed's. No, just keep teaching. The next thing you know, just bang.

After about 10 years, kaboom. He had to go to two services. Next thing you know, there's no parking at that convent.

He has to go to three services. Next thing you know, he's in East Rochester and they're already at three services and still growing in East Rochester. But for 10 years, nothing.

But he persevered. He was faithful. And he did all that God asked him to do.

He testified. He taught. He shared his faith and taught the people.

And man, God has blessed. And there were times when he wondered, I wonder if I should continue. All he asked you to do is testify.

He has the timing. Just be faithful. The reward is faithfulness, no matter how difficult.

Paul didn't have any converts. He did nothing but start a riot. People turned against him.

Ezekiel was asked to share. And we're getting into that book after Jeremiah, Lamentations. He said, Ezekiel, I want you to preach to these people, let them know why they're having their troubles, why they've been destroyed, why they're in Babylon, and I want you to tell them the truth about themselves, and they're not going to listen to you.

What? Not one person? You mean the Bible says he isn't going to grow? No, Ezekiel. In fact, they're going to get angry with you. Not one person is going to... They're going to talk about you behind your back.

They're going to resent you. I want you to preach my word. And you know he was faithful.

Our Bible wouldn't be complete. Our faith wouldn't be enriched if it wasn't for Ezekiel's faithfulness because it was recorded. We've got that marvelous book filled with prophecy and the faithfulness of God with the difficulty of Ezekiel, but he was faithful.

As difficult as it was. That's all God asks you to do. Be faithful in what I've asked you to do, and the rewards will be there.

I'll take care of all the success. You be faithful. That's all he asks.

Paul, be of good cheer. You've testified of me, and you need to go to Rome. And Sinai's saying, after that, never again.

And man, you should... Wait till we see how he got to Rome. What a cruise. What a vacation.

Going to go see Rome. But not the way he expected. But Satan couldn't kill him.

Couldn't stop him. And he can't stop you if you'll just testify and leave everything in his hands. Shall we stand? I really would like to encourage you to guard against complacency and hearts waxing cold as we get closer to the end.

One of the things we're going to have to battle with is complacency and our hearts waxing cold. Jesus specifically said that's one of the things that will be evident at the end. Because iniquity would abound.

Would you agree with me that iniquity seems to be abounding in America and worldwide? Jesus said, that's going to take place. Children will rise up against their parents. Their people begin to lose control of their children.

And it's very easy to see the way they're being educated and the way our society is falling apart. That is being fulfilled. And he said, because of this the hearts of many will wax cold.

Now, whose hearts? People professed to be in love with Jesus at one time. And the next step after that automatically is going back to the old habits. The old attitudes.

The old lifestyle. The old pleasures. They'll begin to eat with the gluttons and drink with the drunkards again.

And beat their fellow servants. Verbal abuse. Hostility, anger, lack of the work of the spirit.

It's automatic. Don't let that happen to you. Keep your heart with all diligence, the Bible says.

For out of it are the issues of heart. Now, how can I keep my heart? By spending time with Jesus. Spending more time with him than serving him.

Because if you don't spend time with him and try to serve him it'll turn into works and frustration. You'll get tired and you'll get bored and you'll lose interest. If you sit with him and spend time with him his love will continue to keep you and you'll fall more in love with him.

And believe me, there are times you don't want to get away. You don't want to start your day. It is so wonderful getting up and spending time with Jesus.

You don't care if the day does come. And you catch yourself the night before wanting to get to bed so you can get up earlier. You catch yourself thinking I can't wait to get up in the morning to be with him.

It's wonderful. It's wonderful. Oh, it's only a few hours and we'll be able to get up with him again.

And besides that, you can go to bed with him. Don't go to bed with CNBC, Geraldo, or no matter how juicy things are men are watching, don't go to bed with that. Don't make that the last thing.

Make sure you go to bed with the Lord. Father, we thank you and praise you that we need not fear once we begin with you, if we just testify and trust you. And Lord, we thank you that you are faithful, that the more desperate things are, the more quick you are to be there for us.

That you love us so much, Lord, that when we're greatly discouraged that you'll be there to tell us to be of good cheer, that we are going to make it. And so, remind us all continually, Lord, as we wait upon you, sit with you, enjoy fellowshiping with you each day as you fill us afresh for those things we have to face. The fullness of your Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

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