

'You're Next'

by Jill Briscoe

Festo and Mera's story teaches us about the importance of trusting in God's protection and guidance, even in the midst of danger and uncertainty.

Scripture: Psalm 91:11, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 28:20, 2 Corinthians 4:8, Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Divine Protection", "Faith And Courage"

Description

Jill Briscoe preaches about the faith and courage of Festo and Mera as they embark on a dangerous journey to escape persecution, relying on God's protection and guidance through the mountains. Despite the risks and uncertainties, they trust in God's love and presence, finding strength in prayer and the assurance that Jesus is with them in their struggles. Festo and Mera's story reflects the biblical truth that God sends His angels to protect and guide His children, even in the darkest and most challenging times.

Transcript

Hark hurried out of the big church and started looking for Festo and Mera. He looked all over Kampala. But they were not there!

Maybe they've gone back to Kabale, their hometown, Hark decided. He flew there in an instant (even though it was 260 miles away). But Festo and Mera were not there, either! Hark found some neighbors cleaning Festo and Mera's house.

"Oh, we will miss them so! But I hope they escape safely over the mountains," one of the neighbors was whispering to another. "It is such a dangerous trail, and so hard to find. And the nights are so dark!"

"God will protect them," her friend replied. "He will send his angels to show the way."

"They did not want to go," the first woman noted. "They love Uganda. But their church friends urged them to leave this country. They said Festo and Mera could help Uganda more if they were alive than if they were dead!"

The woman talked on with great excitement. As they worked, she told her friend what she had heard the church friends tell Festo the day before. "They reminded Festo that Paul the apostle had escaped from Damascus when his life was in danger. His friends lowered him over the city wall in a basket! And Peter went to another place, too, when the angel let him out of prison," the woman said.¹⁸

"They begged Festo to leave," she went on. "They told him, 'The soldiers came to your house many times while you were in Kampala. They were looking for you, Festo. Everyone knows you're next.'"

Thinking about what had happened next, the woman's voice became soft. "Festo asked everyone to pray about it," she said. "So they did. After the prayer, Festo decided it was right to try to escape."

Hearing this, Hark realized he had missed an important part of Festo's story.

"And that's the part that's missing from the record," he said, looking at his assignment. So he flew back in time to the day before. Then he set off toward the mountains, looking for Festo and Mera.

He found them that night in a borrowed car, bouncing along the steep, narrow trail at the foot of the mountain. Festo was still wearing the beautiful purple shirt Hark liked so much.

"Oh, Festo, I hope the police didn't see your shirt as we left. They'll know it was you. They'll figure out that we're trying to escape," Mera said a little nervously. "I'm sorry. I can't help but feel scared. It seems so lonely out here. There aren't any signs. And we don't know which way to go! I think we're lost!"

"Surely the trail that crosses the mountains is here somewhere," Festo replied. He looked very worried. "Maybe we've passed it. I'll turn around."

But the path was meant for people, not cars. As Festo swung the car around, it skidded in the loose rocks. It slid to the very edge of the hillside. Mera thought they would plunge over the side! But just in time, the car stopped.

Festo and Mera were scared. But Hark, riding invisibly in the back, smiled as he looked out the window. The neighbor back in Kabale had been right. "Angels are all around us," Hark wrote happily. "They kept the car from sliding off the mountain."

Hark knew the King of heaven sent angels to protect and help Christians. They were also there to welcome the King's children into heaven if it was their time to go. Hark was so happy to be an angel -- and to see his friends.

Suddenly Festo became very quiet. "Don't you feel Jesus near us?" he asked. Mera was quiet, too.

"Yes! Jesus is telling me our lives are in His hands," Mera said gently after a bit.

"And He loves us, Mera. Don't forget He loves us," replied Festo. "Jesus was in danger, too. So He knows just how we both feel."

The two tired people -- and Hark -- rode on in the rattling car. For more than two hours, they looked for the trail. They worried that Amin's soldiers would catch them before they found the right path!

Finally, they noticed a small clearing. Somehow they had missed it as they had bounced back and forth along the hillside. "It's the trail!" Festo cried. "But we're going to have to walk from here, Mera. Do you think you can climb over the mountain?"

"With God's help, Festo," his wife replied. And so they set out over the dark, dangerous path.

Hark worried about them as they climbed. Mera is so sick, he thought. She's afraid the soldiers are behind them. She worries they will hear her coughing.

But no soldiers appeared.

"God has gone before us," exclaimed Festo as they stopped to rest.

"His angels have cleared the way for you!" Hark added happily, though no one could hear him. "That's what they were doing while you were lost at the bottom of the mountain."

"Mera, do you think you can go on again?" asked Festo after a little while. She nodded, gritting her teeth. They would climb a few minutes. Then they would rest again. And all the time, they were praying.

"Jesus is here. He'll give us strength," Mera panted. And on they would go. "Look out!" cried Festo, catching hold of Mera's hand. "There's a steep dropoff on both sides of us!" Hark went ahead of the two, shining a little of his angel light on the steep path. Mera and Festo thought it was moonlight.

"What do you think is happening to Charity?" worried Festo as they picked their way over the dangerous trail.

"And all the people who helped us escape?" added Mera. "Will they all be safe, Festo?"

"The Lord will help them as He has helped us," Festo replied with confidence.

They met the sun at the top of the mountain. What a sunrise it was! The date was Sunday, February 20. In a few hours, the great service for the archbishop would be held far away in Kampala.

Festo and Mera stood on the mountain, looking over the land below. God's creation was bathed in soft mist. The sun itself seemed to say, "Welcome Festo and Mera! Welcome to freedom and safety. There is still work for you both to do!"

Going down the other side of the mountains in the the daylight was much easier than climbing in the dark. At the bottom, Festo and Mera stopped and smiled at each other.

"We're over the border, Festo!" Mera shouted with joy. Then they began to thank God for the way He had led them out of Uganda.

But their adventure wasn't over. They were in another country, yes. But they still had a long way to go for help.

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