

## ACTS 12:1-17

### Forging Faith that Never Fails

6/8/25

Have you ever asked yourself why bad things happen to Christians?

Why do those who have rejected the world, and been saved by Christ, not only continue to suffer the same aches, pains and ailments as everyone else, but at times bear additional suffering for no other reason than proclaiming the name of Jesus as our Lord and Savior?

To top it off, when Christians suffer, why does God heal, seem to spare and rescue **some** – but not **others**?

Considering these things, how can we have a faith that is strong, yet flexible, and trustworthy under trial? **How can we forge a faith that never fails?**

These are questions we are going to consider as we study through these passages in Acts 12:1-17

Before we get into the depth of our study let's take a minute to look at our three main people involved.

**PETER**, also known as Cephas or Simon

A fisherman from the region of Galilee. Peter was first introduced to Jesus by his brother **Andrew** who had met the Lord through the teaching of John the Baptist.

Not long afterward, Peter and Andrew were fishing near the shoreline.

Nearby were brothers **JAMES** and John mending nets in their father's boats. Luke 5:10 tells us these were partners with Peter.

*.... James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."*

**PETER** – was a natural leader and became the most outspoken of the 12 men that Jesus would call as His first disciples and equip as Apostles for the sake of the church.

There are multiple men with the name of **JAMES** found in scripture – including one who was the ½ brother of Jesus through Mary, their mother.

The **James** of today's lesson is John's brother. Jesus affectionally referred to them as the "*Sons of thunder*." – which gives us some insight to their personality.

James and John were consistently seen in the inner circle and near to Jesus- they are frequently named together as being present during various miracles worked

by Jesus and were among the few that Jesus took with him to the mount of transfiguration where they saw the glory of the Lord shine forth from Jesus.

Although scripture does not record specifics of James' ministry after the ascension of Jesus – it is presumed that he continued to be a bold and clear voice for the gospel in the region – such that it drew the attention of our third person in today's lesson-

### **Herod Agrippa, King of Judea.**

The family of Herod had been the ruling class in Judea since the time of **Herod the Great** in **37BC**

- Historically, Herod the Great is known for gaining favor with his Jewish subject's and solidify his reign by greatly increasing the size and splendor of Solomon's temple.
- He is also known for being the king of Judea who sought to have the child born "King of the Jews" **put to death** by ordering the death of all male children **less than two-years** of age born in the region of Bethlehem.

Herod the Great's dynasty was established politically the Roman Empire, who placed him in charge of the region as a puppet king answering to Rome.

After the death of Herod, the Great –his **sons, Antipas, Archelaus and Philip** managed through politics to hold onto influential power.

Caesar made his judgement and placed **Herod Antipas** over the region of Galilee and gave other portions of the kingdom to the other siblings.

We recall **Herod Antipas** as being ruler over the northern lands of the Jordan and Galilee during which time he took his brother's wife for his own, while he was still lived.

**This was also the time of John the Baptist** – who publicly condemned the king for the marriage.

While Antipas was not a particularly evil man – He obviously lacked moral values. At the request of his new wife, he had John the Baptist arrested and beheaded. (See Matthew 14)

Over the following years, the brother of Antipas who had been placed over the region of Jerusalem had become **SO despised by the Jews** that he **lost favor with Rome** as well for failing to keep peace in the land.

Upon the death of Herod Antipas – His nephew, **Agrippa**, one of the grandsons of Herod the Great, leveraged his way politically in Rome and with Caesar to be name **Herod Agrippa, King of all Judea.**

As we come to our lesson today, we find **Herod Agrippa, in power** and **determined** to succeed in **maintaining power** by not only **appeasing Rome**, but the **Jews** as well.

This was a particularly difficult task because of the deep family disdain that existed.

The family of Herod were essentially descendants of the **Edomites** –the family of Edom – whose patriarch was **Esau**.

- Esau's Father had been **Isaac**, and his brother was **Jacob** – who would go on to replace Esau in the family blessing and was later named **Israel**.
- There has never been a true time of peace between the nations of these two brothers.

Because of this, the Jewish people had always disdained the Herod kingship enforced on them by Rome.

Herod Agrippa was likely aware of Jesus of Nazareth and the interactions between him and his uncle, **Herod Antipas, who had met and mocked the so-called-King of the Jews** during the trials that were meant to end with the execution of Jesus.

Herod saw the disdain the Jewish rulers had for the followers of this Jesus and **saw an opportunity to entreat them with a favor** – to align with them in the persecution of those who called themselves, "The Way" and who were now being referred to collectively as "Christians."

### **ACTS 12:1-2**

**Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. <sup>2</sup> And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.**

There is always a cost to following Jesus.

Sometimes- it is the daily struggle to walk the narrow path of righteousness instead of the wide road of the world.

Sometimes- it is a cost of friends, family, and ease of making a living.

Sometimes- it is to have our life on earth ended at the hands of wicked men.

King Herod makes a bold and public first move.

- First, he had rounded up and arrested a group of people identified as belonging to the “CHURCH” of Jesus. Those known for proclaiming and following His teaching.
  - Ekklesia – assembly, congregation (i.e., Christians)

Without mention of a trial – King Herod orders the immediate execution of James, the brother of John, the first of the Apostles to be martyred.

In **Matthew 20:20-28**, we read of a conversation between Jesus and the mother of James, and John and the brother’s as well.

*Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She \*said to Him, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.”*

*But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”*

*They \*said to Him, “We are able.”*

*He \*said to them, “My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.”*

Jesus knew full well the persecution that was coming for these men whom He had called as disciples and would then send out as Apostles.

- When all was said and done – all of them but John would die a martyr’s death and John would face years of prison and suffering.

“My cup you shall drink” – Jesus referred to the suffering and judgment that He would endure for the sins of mankind.

When we faithfully partake in communion, we willingly drink from the cup that represents the New Covenant that Christ made available to all those who drink of it in faith.

But like these men – all those who willingly partake of that cup – place themselves in harm’s way of those of the world, who reject Christ Jesus and His teachings.

They, we, you and I, by drinking from the one – acknowledge and accept that we may end up drinking from the other.

**BY ONE CUP** we were set free of the judgement of God –

**Romans 8:1-2** Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

**BY THE OTHER** – we face the same persecution and prosecution that Jesus faced.

Jesus declared,

**John 15:19-21**

“If you were of the world, it would love you as its own. Instead, the world hates you, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But they will treat you like this because of My name, since they do not know the One who sent Me.”

**Friends, there is ALWAYS a COST to following Jesus.**

– It will cost you the ways of the world – and the world may demand everything of you.

**But NEVER FORGET, there is also a REWARD to following Jesus.**

(1/2 brother of Jesus)-

**James 1:12** Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

As for King Herod...

**ACTS 12:3-5**

<sup>3</sup> When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. <sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

We assume that James was easily found and arrested because people knew who he was because of his bold life and testimony in the name of Jesus.

- I pray you and I would also be easily found!!

Peter was surely another well-known Christian in those days. King Herod must have thought to himself, “*Well, if it pleased them that I had James killed... how much more that I put this man Peter to death!*”

King Herod planned on playing his part to the fullest. He knew the **Passover** was just a few days away and the Jewish people and their leaders would be in full ceremonial and religious observance until after the ceremonies and services.

Therefore, he had Peter placed in a prison until AFTER the Passover to MAXIMIZE the effect of him having the leader of the Christian Church executed.

**DO NOT MISS** the connection to **Peter's predicament** and the **POWER of PRAYER** be exercised by the church!!

Peter was powerless – but friends, our prayers are POWERFUL!

*Philippians 4:6*

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

*James 5:16*

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*

*1 John 5:14-15*

*And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.*

Are you hurting physically, spiritually, emotionally? **PRAY**

Do you know a brother or sister in Christ who is hurting? **PRAY**

Do you desire to be protected, comforted, encouraged or do you desire these things for a brother or sister in Christ? **PRAY**

Pray your prayers of **adoration**, your **confessions**, your **thankfulness**, and your requests/**supplications** to God - in Jesus name –

Acknowledge to your Heavenly Father that **first and foremost HIS will be done**

**– And then submit yourself to His sovereign response.**

### **ACTS 12:6**

**<sup>6</sup> On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.**

I Love My God.

Again, when man thought he had it all figured out – God demonstrated again that HE is the SOVEREIGN GOD.

On the very night... Surely King Herod had made all kinds of preparation for the execution of Peter... (He and his guests were about to be very disappointed!)

It was most uncommon, and scripture does not give us the details of why FOUR SQUADS of Roman soldiers were placed on a ROUND-THE-CLOCK personal assignment to guard a loud-mouth trouble making fisherman from Galilee.

Nor does it tell us outright why they felt it necessary to bind him with **TWO CHAINS** - and to place **TWO GUARDS - IN THE ROOM** with him - while **TWO MORE** were stationed JUST OUTSIDE the door.

**MAYBE... I do not know...** word had spread how this fisherman from Galilee had a way of escaping prison cells...

Perhaps the religious leaders from Acts 5 told the King how **they too** had once arrested Peter and placed him in a cell, **under guard**, awaiting trial, and yet the following morning when they sent for him, the officer of the prison house had reported –

*Acts 5:23 saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside."*

But surely that couldn't happen again ... RIGHT?

Also do not miss the fear, anxiety and panic that has paralyzed Peter –

**No? oh right... he's sleeping.**

When I consider the things that keep me up at night – I try to remember and remind myself that no matter what I am facing – GOD IS IN CONTROL.

**Proverbs 19:21 teaches** us - *"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."*

God had already many times over demonstrated that He could be trusted.

And even though James had just paid the ultimate price in the flesh for his faith – Peter was not worried.

Perhaps God would spare him – as he had done in the past

Perhaps he too would pay the ultimate price in the flesh for his faith.

But what then? The words of **Psalms 4:8** are powerful here-

*In peace I will both lie down and sleep,  
For You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety.*

Friends hear me,

- whether we are spared or we suffer
- whether we are pardoned or are persecuted
- even to the point of death
- relax, rest, sleep easy.

For even in death we are safe and secure in the promises of the redemption that is for those who are found in Christ Jesus.

Peter understood this – Paul understood this – I pray YOU understand this –

**Philippians 1:21** *“For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

### **ACTS 12:7-10**

**7** And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. **8** And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he \*said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." **9** And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. **10** When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

So, then it was rescue. – **BUT WHY? Why Peter and not James?**

There can be only one answer – **BECAUSE IT WAS THE WILL OF GOD.**

We can debate the demonstration to the righteous to build a solid faith on the assurance of the promises of eternal life.

We can discuss the demonstration of the coldness, the wickedness, the contempt that those who live in and for the world have for those who live in and for the glory of the Lord.



But in the end – and for all the debates – it is for this simple reason – it was the will of God.

But before we malign His sovereign will – remember that it is He who created all things – even you –

And therefore, holds all authority to do with as He pleases over all that He has created. As does the Potter over the clay.

*Romans 9:20-21*

*But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, “Why did You make me like this?” Does not the potter have the right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for special occasions and another for common use?*

That men who love the way of the world would slay a person who loves the way of Christ should come as no surprise.

- **Praise be to God** that He has assured those who suffer and perish for His name’s sake that they will be rewarded in heaven!

**Matthew 5:11-12** *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

- **And praise be to God** when He sovereignly rescues any from their persecution at the hands of wicked men!

## **ACTS 12:11-12**

**<sup>11</sup> When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.” <sup>12</sup> And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.**

So many fun things are revealed in this section of scripture.

How soundly had Peter been sleeping? So soundly that when the angel appeared in his prison cell telling him to get up and get dressed, Peter thought he was dreaming.

Have you ever had one of those waking dreams where you feel half-asleep and like you almost have some control over the dream, but not really?

- Maybe that’s just me...

The point is, Peter with great recollection could retell the story of the angel in his cell, kicked him in the side and told him to get up. How the chains had fallen off wrists and they simply walked out of the prison, unseen by the guards.

- Were they blinded, made to sleep, we don't know – but we know this, they were going to have a hard time explaining this in the morning!

Then Peter finds himself standing alone in the brisk morning air. And THEN it dawns on him - I'M NOT DREAMING!

Peter was likely aware the church would be praying for him and so he heads straight to a place where he was sure members of the church would be gathered, the home of one of their loyal members, Mary, and her son John, who was also called Mark.

It is so important to know where to turn to when you have times of need, either to ask for prayer or to report of matters to be praised.

The church family is essential in this as we serve together as the Body of Christ.

Every part is important, and every household should be a haven.

### **ACTS 12:13-17**

<sup>13</sup> When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup> When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.

<sup>15</sup> They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel." <sup>16</sup> But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.

<sup>17</sup> But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.

Though it was likely pre-dawn at this time – Peter arrives at the house and knocks on the door.

Okay, you have to picture this scene, right?

INSIDE God's people were praying → And the answer to their prayer was standing OUTSIDE at the door!

The servant girl Rhoda goes to the door – asks who it is – and recognizes the voice of Peter – but then runs off to tell the others – without opening the door!

The angel had a far easier time of getting Peter out of prison than Peter was having to get into the prayer meeting!

Here to we see the shock and disbelief of those who were praying for this thing.

- “*You are out of your mind*” they declare “*It is his angel*” the exclaim.

Isn't it amazing how we can pray for something – even fervently – and still be amazed at when God **actually answers** our prayers?

The problem of course is that we do not pray full of faith and in all assurance.

We do not pray with ALL our heart for God's will to be done.

We find ourselves praying ...because what else can we do?

When the matter is out of the hands, out of the control of man – Only God retains the power and authority to change the outcome – and so we pray.

**Mark 11:24**

*Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*

At first glance this seems to read that whatever I pray for, God is obligated to give to me.

But that of course is not the truth of it. Otherwise, God would be no more than an all-powerful genie in bible that was controlled by our prayers – **May it never be!**

Recall that we said earlier that one of the keys to answered prayer is to pray that the Will of God is done.

**1 John 5:14** “If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

And this was modeled by Christ Himself in the garden.

We read also in **Matthew 6:33** *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be provided to you.*

But even in those days, the church who were gathered to pray were amazed at the sight of Peter standing freely at their door – **an answer to their prayers!**

Over the commotion of their excitement, Peter quiets them down and tells them the things that had happened.

**And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren."**

A little confusion since James had just been killed –

But remember we have multiple men named "James" in scripture.

- James, who was the first of the Apostles to be martyred.
- James, who was the ½ brother of Jesus, author of the Book of James, and had become the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

**Then he left and went to another place.**

You can imagine the pressure that the Jews and Rome placed on the church to locate Peter.

Scripture does not say where Peter went after this, but from here on his appearance in the biblical account of the early church is VERY limited.

It is also worth mentioning that nowhere in the biblical account or in church history is there any mention of replacing James who was martyred as the 12 had replaced Judas after his death.

- Further evidence that the apostolic age was coming to a close.

<<<IN CLOSING>>>

### **Forging Faith that Never Fails**

The strongest steel is the steel that has been forged in the furnace and tempered.

The process requires the soft steel to be exposed to high heat before being cooled. **This process changes the very molecular structure of the steel.**

Once properly forged and tempered –

- The steel achieves a balance of hardness and strength making it suitable for a wide range of uses.
- It is capable of flexing without snapping and with being struck repeatedly and bluntly without breaking.

**This is the kind of faith you and I NEED in this cruel and punishing world.**

How is a forged faith like this developed?

- **First** – we must be fully convinced of the truth, trustworthiness and authority of the Word of God.

- **Second-** being convinced of this I must commit myself to prayer and the study of God's word.
  - In it, God reveals Himself, His plan for my life, and His promises that secure my eternity.
- **Third** – God allows times of trial, testing, and tribulation to come into our lives. It is through the overcoming of these things in faith and trusting in God that we are strengthened.

**James 1:2-4** Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

**1 Peter 1:6-7** Peter speaking of our imperishable inheritance that is reserved in Heaven. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,<sup>7</sup> so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

And even if I should suffer, **even if I should perish** – I know **TWO THINGS** for sure-

(1) My eternity is secure in Christ

(2) The judgement of the wicked is assured by my sovereign God.

**Isaiah 35:4** "say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution **he will come to save you."**

God knows your problems, your predicaments, and your persecutors...

I am forever grateful that nothing skips the attention of our God.

**Psalms 34:15-19**

<sup>15</sup>The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous And His ears are open to their cry. (prayer) <sup>16</sup>The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth. <sup>17</sup>The righteous cry, and the LORD hears And delivers them out of all their troubles. <sup>18</sup>The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit. <sup>19</sup>**Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.**

Foremost and forever – By God's grace through faith – He has delivered me from my sin –And today and forever – that will is sufficient for me to proclaim Him, regardless of the cost.