

Not Even Persecution or Suffering Will Hinder His Mission

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[0 : 00] and turn to the book of Acts. Acts chapter 12. If you're visiting with us, you can go to that black Bible in a chair in front of you.

And if you pull that out, go towards the back and find page 102. Page 102 in that black Bible, Acts chapter 12.

We're going to do the whole chapter this morning. Whoa, hey, come on, fella. Take it easy. We're going to do the whole chapter this morning, 1 through 25. Acts 12.

Starting in verse 1.

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

[1 : 11] And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of unleavened bread. When we had seized him, he put Peter in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.

So Peter was kept in prison. But prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. And on the very nights 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. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared. And a light shone in the cell. And he struck Peter's side and roused him, saying, Get up quickly.

And his chains fell off his hands. 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.

And he went out and continued to follow. And he did not know what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. Verse 10. And 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.

[2 : 24] And they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from them. And 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.

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. And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.

And 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. And they said to her, You are out of your mind.

But she kept insisting that it was so. And they kept saying, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking. And when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.

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. And he departed and went to another place. Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as of what could have become of Peter.

[3 : 39] And when Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards in order that they be led away to execution. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. And with one accord, they came to him and having won over Blastus to King's Chamberlain, they were asking for peace because their country was fed by the king's country.

And on an appointed day, Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took a seat on the rostrum and delivered an address to them. And the people kept crying out the voice of a God and not of a man.

And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark. It was in the 1700s, the French agnostic philosopher of Voltaire, who would have forgotten even who Jesus Christ was.

[5 : 02] Interesting. Fifty years after his prediction, the Geneva Bible Society was running off thousands of Bibles on presses that were set up in Voltaire's former Geneva home. Who would have thunk?

Some things are not as they seem to be. Take history, for example. Some would say this revolutionary war would never happen with these militia soldiers in the revolutionary war.

And yet here we are today. Take the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. I mean, who would have thunk something like that would have turned the tide of World War II.

Some things appear to be hindrances, apparent hindrances, and yet they're not. Take other examples, like personal lives.

For instance, the early death of David Brainerd. Among the Native Americans, he had this ministry, and just revival swept through because of his life.

[6 : 12] He died in his early 20s. The deaths of Adorayim Judson's wives and children in Burma. You would think that something like that would have hindered, would have put setbacks to the ministry.

It didn't. Not at all. The setbacks for Lottie Moon when she was in China. The, so to speak, setback trials, constant trials Hudson Taylor faced in China.

Apparent hindrances. Apparent setbacks. Not so. What about persecution?

It seems to be negative. Apparently. Apparently. It seems like persecution, it seems like suffering in this world, are setbacks to the advance of the gospel.

It seems like that initially. It seems like that initially, it'll be setbacks to the gospel advancing, a setback for God's glory, but they're not.

[7 : 25] And as we come to this passage in Acts, Acts, just do it. Be who you are. Let God use you to fulfill His mission. We see here, not even persecution or suffering will hinder God's mission.

Not even persecution. Not suffering. That will not hinder His mission. It may seem like it.

You may be suffering today. You may be facing persecution today. And it seems like a setback. It seems like a hindrance to God's glory in your life.

To advancement of the gospel in your life. But it's not. Let me put it to you in a statement. Not even persecution or suffering will hinder God's mission.

Though it seems that persecution or suffering hinders God's word, it doesn't. It extends and sets it forward, actually.

[8 : 40] So, let's welcome persecution and suffering. Knowing that God uses it to glorify His name and to advance the progress of the good news of Jesus Christ.

In our passage, we see God sovereignly protects His church and yet He allows one of His own to be killed and another to be rescued. Why?

We must trust God's wisdom and goodness and just pray. He will judge the enemies of His new community and He will make sure the good news advances and He will make sure that His name is glorified.

He will. You can bank on that. It's kind of ironic, our passage, our passage, this chapter is so full of irony.

James is killed, Peter's in prison, arrested in prison, waiting for execution. Herod triumphs. But then, that's how it begins.

[9 : 53] But then, how it ends is Herod dies, excuse me, Peter's freed, Herod dies, the word triumphs. It's major irony, contradictions within just a chapter that Luke poses for us.

You see, persecution, prayer, deliverance, the gospel advances and all of this is for the glory of God. Look, in spite of the persecution of God's people or you can say the suffering of God's people, God will glorify His name and He will advance the message of His Son to the whole world.

And if He has to, He will use your suffering, He will use persecution to do that in our lives, Christian. You see this happening.

James, John's brother's martyr. Peter's arrested. He's miraculously delivered. Herod promotes himself arrogantly but then he faces God's judgment. Persecution was real in Jerusalem.

All of these things are happening but God is sovereign and wants His name to be glorified. He glorifies His name by having some of us suffer and He glorifies His name by having us rescued.

[11 : 13] But God is zealous for the glory of His name. I mean, how could the powerful monarch Herod stand up to the almighty holy awesome God?

You can't and you won't. God is sovereign over what's happening in the lives of His people. And when you see gospel growth you will also see church growth.

And as God sees fit He will remove barriers so that the message of His Son will thrive and flourish. Be sure of this through your suffering through your persecution His word will not come back void in your life.

It will not. There's a method to my madness as to why we read those passages in Isaiah 55 and 1 Peter chapter 5. They correlate together.

In the midst of suffering He will establish and confirm you and His word will not come back void in your life. though it may seem like that though it may seem like a setback in your life in my life He will glorify His name.

[12 : 39] So let's work through the passage work through the text this morning and I got four points for you. Point number one persecution and suffering the apparent hindrances to God's word.

Persecution and suffering the apparent hindrances to God's word. It starts off with the bad news. About that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them and he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

Good job Herod. Herod Agrippa I is who this is for increasing the persecution against the church in Jerusalem. Specifically who is this Herod?

He's the grandson of Herod the great. Herod the great was in power when Jesus was born. This is Herod Agrippa I the grandson of Herod the great.

He was educated and raised in Rome. He was good buddies with Caligula and Caligula expanded Herod Agrippa his rule in AD 41 and he ruled from 41 to 44.

[13 : 50] He died suddenly in 44. We're going to see that later. He was half Jew. He carefully observed the laws of Judaism.

He treated the Jews kindly. He practiced the law himself and guess how the Jews thought of him? Oh he was awesome.

They loved Herod Agrippa I first. Because he catered to them. He catered and he was a part of Judaism. So to stay in good graces with the Sadducees to stay in good graces with the Jewish people he aggressively went after the church by having James John's brother beheaded.

He says killed with a sword most likely he was beheaded. He laid evil hands upon the church without any mercy. James is the first apostle killed.

Which fulfills Jesus' prediction in Mark chapter 10 verse 39. Yes they would drink the same cup that Jesus drank and he just did. He was killed.

[15 : 08] Killing James was Herod's deliberate attempt to destroy the church. How? Why? He wants to destroy the leadership of the church. He would face the consequences for doing that.

But why was James killed and yet we'll see in just a moment Peter was spared. God's providence is a mystery. It reminds us to rely on his daily mercy and realize that he has a gracious plan for his people as he cares for them.

notice in verse 3 he saw it pleased the Jews and so he arrested Peter too. Notice it says it was the days of unleavened bread.

So it's during Passover. He seized him and so he planned it says there he planned to take Peter and then to verse 4 intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.

So his plan was to bring Peter out before the people. He was going to judge him and most likely he was going to execute him. That was the plan. Notice how the gap between the Jews and Christians grew wider and wider.

[16 : 33] Interesting Peter's arrested during the time of Passover which it was the same time that Jesus was arrested. Interesting. But also Passover was a celebration of Israel's rescue from the Egyptian people who oppressed God's people.

That's ironic because God would rescue Peter. And notice he was heavily guarded. He put him in prison in verse 4 delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him.

16 soldiers their watch changed every three hours to guarantee they were alert at all times. We find out later he actually had two guards chain him one on this arm one on that arm and then he had guards at the front door.

We ain't taking any chances because y'all remember what happened last time with Peter? Acts chapter 5 how he escaped? Uh-uh. Uh-uh. We ain't gonna do that again.

So they're making sure 16 soldiers they're fresh around the clock making sure they're nice and fresh. Nobody's falling asleep. Chained on either side two at the door.

[17 : 53] James killed Peter in prison. Notice how verse 5 says so Peter was kept in the prison. James killed Peter in prison ready to be executed.

All was lost isn't it? All is lost isn't it? No. Christian are you suffering today?

Are you hurting today? Do you need a fresh reminder of God's grace? Jesus suffered too but he was exalted.

Don't despair. Don't despair. Hope in God. It's only apparent in your life.

Does not Paul say in Acts chapter 8 verse 18? For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us?

[19 : 04] Christian don't despair in your suffering. It's only an apparent hindrance. It's only an apparent setback.

Hope in God. So we see the persecution, suffering, the apparent hindrances to God's word. But notice how things begin to turn here.

Which brings us to our second point. God's sovereign rescue. And I put, he answers yes. In other words, they're praying and he answers yes, I'm going to rescue Peter.

Peter. God's sovereign rescue. Verses 5 through 17. And I purposely stopped here in the middle of verse 5.

And I noticed how verse 5 continues on. But, prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. Yet, the church was fervently praying for him.

[20 : 13] According to his sovereign will as his people pray, God uses the means of prayer to bring about the sovereign rescue of his people for his glory. So, don't stop praying.

Don't stop asking. Just trust God and pray. Just trust God and pray. Now, what were they praying for?

It seems like they were praying for his release. Maybe. We don't know that. It kind of seems like that. We'll kind of bend towards that. Maybe they were praying for boldness and his death.

Maybe they were praying for the progress of the gospel through Peter. But we do know they prayed passionately for him, as passionately as Jesus prayed in the garden.

Because that word fervently, it's the same word that's used by Jesus in the garden. They were fervently praying. Jesus was fervently praying. They were fervently praying for Peter.

[21 : 12] And then you have verses 6-10. His rescue. Notice how it's set up. The very nights, how God rescued through the angel of the Lord at the right time, the very night before his judgment, as the Jews were celebrating God's rescue of his people from those who oppressed his people.

That's kind of funny. And then as the Israelites escaped Egypt, they had to go in haste, right? They had to go really fast. That's why the angel says, notice, verse 7, Behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared, a light shown in the cell, kicked Peter right in the bottom, who knows where he kicked him, kicked him, he said, wake up!

Get up, rouse him, saying, get up quickly. And then his chains fell off his hands, and the angel said to him, gird yourself, put on your sandals, he did so. And he said to him, wrap your cloak around you, and follow me.

Interesting, though Herod did a great deal to ensure Peter's security and chance of escape, he wasn't more powerful than the Lord.

He acted in response to the prayers of his people according to his will. Oh, and did you notice something as well? Did you notice that Peter was asleep?

[22 : 35] Peter asleep? This is amazing. It showed he trusted in God's sovereign provision, which is why the angel had to kick him, to get him up, get dressed, put on your sandals, wrap yourself in a cloak, follow me.

Peter did what he was told. What about the soldiers though? Maybe they were in a deep sleep given to them by the angel. Maybe it happened without them even realizing it.

That'd be even more creepy. Notice, it says, verse 9, he went out and continued to follow. He didn't know what was being done by the angel. He thought he was seeing a vision.

Well, I guess I'm seeing a vision. Notice how it says, verse 10, they passed the first, second guard, they came to the iron gate.

It opened for them by itself. He went out, went along one street, immediately the angel departed from him. Peter came to himself realizing, he says this, now I know for sure, verse 11, 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.

[23 : 53] God had just rescued him out of the clutches of Herod and the Jews. He knew they wanted him dead. And God had prevented this from happening. It shows that, look, some believers they face suffering and others are rescued.

And we don't know why. God just did that. I mean, it could have been swapped. He could have had Peter beheaded and James, he could have continued on.

We don't know. But we do know that God is zealous for the glory of his name. And he sovereignly rescues. The story continues on.

Verse 12, he realizes he headed to Mary's house, Mary, the mother of John, Mark. He was the one who wrote the gospel of Mark from Peter's perspective. Mark and Peter became good buddies.

A widow, most likely, possibly wealthy too because the church gathered in her home and she had a servant, a maid servant, so she possibly had quite a bit of money.

[25 : 02] Interesting, if God's community, if they were praying for Peter's release, they had no idea that God had just answered their prayers. So, 13, he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.

And when she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy, she didn't open the gate, but ran in and announced, Peter was standing in the front gate. She recognized Peter's voice, but yet she got so stoked and excited, she runs and, guess what, Peter's at the gate.

Now, it is rather humorous, because here Peter's knocking, wait a second, you know, maybe he sees a little crack and she sees her run, he's like, what the heck is she doing?

What are you doing? Hey, hey, hey, right? So it's rather humorous, but also, this shows that she was ready to believe God would rescue Peter and answer to prayer, unlike the other saints who were surprised by God's timely response.

She was ready to embrace that? What was their problem? Because notice, Peter's at the front gate, what? You're crazy, you're screwy.

[26 : 34] But notice, she insisted, and then they kept saying, verse 15, it's his angel, oh, he's already dead, it's his angel, oh no, what, huh, what are you talking about?

Though they prayed, they were so surprised as to what is going on, and yet notice verse 16, Peter just kept knocking, they finally opened the door, and they were shocked, they were stunned, and maybe they began to talk, maybe they're chatting, and how it's happened, everything started to get loud, and Peter's like, oh, take it easy, hold on, notice, it says, he motioned, motioned with his hand for them to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had let him out of the prison, the Lord did this, he rescued me, tell James and the others about what happened, and then it says, he departed and went to another place, where, it's not clear, some say, he went to Rome, or to Antioch, you're throwing it into the text, the text doesn't say that, what is clear, he got out of sight, he was not told by the angel, go back and keep preaching, the angel just left, so he's like, that's my key, that's my message, to get out of here, get out of town, and now we're introduced to James, the James here is the

Lord's half brother, he actually becomes, and we will see this later on in chapter 15, a pillar in the Jerusalem church, and he wasn't slain until AD 62, so here we see, friends, God was glorified in answering the prayers of his people, also he's glorified in the death of his godly ones, God glorifies himself, and he will bring about the advancement of the message of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, so Christian, don't despair, keep praying because God may in fact deliver you from your suffering for the glory of his name, we can have such great confidence that whether it be our suffering, or our rescue, God will make sure his sovereign name is glorified, be encouraged by that, again, you may be here suffering, you may be here facing persecution, you may be here facing cancer, disease, sickness, be encouraged, keep praying, don't despair,

God may rescue you, but even if he doesn't, you can know for sure that God will glorify his name, and he's sovereign in your suffering, and he's sovereign in your rescue, you may be sovereign in your rescue, so we look at persecution, suffering, the apparent hindrances to God's word, and then we see how the passage is beginning to turn, we see how God sovereignly rescues, he answers their prayer, and then as we come to this part of the irony, or of the contradiction within the passage, we come to point number three, God's sovereign judgment, God's sovereign judgment, opponents of the gospel will be judged, whereas God's good news of his eternal son will continue to prosper, look, anyone who opposes his word, anyone who opposes his son, or anyone who opposes his people, will be judged eventually, that will happen, maybe not now, maybe later, maybe not three years from now, maybe six, maybe nine, maybe twelve, maybe fifty, maybe the end of time, but God takes seriously the opposition of his word,

God takes seriously the opposition to his son, God takes seriously the opposition to his people, verse 18, meanwhile, back at the ranch, when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers, what happened?

[31 : 00] They tried to figure out how Peter escaped, they were frantic, so it seems, now, I don't know, but, my opinion, it seems the soldiers were under the impression they were not sleeping, that they were not sleeping, so either something supernatural happened to them to sleep, or, it all happened, they were awake, and they were just, I don't know, they were blinded by it, I don't know, as far as they were concerned, they didn't think they were asleep, but yet the accusation is this, either you guys are accused of sleeping, or you helped him escape, there is no other explanation for it, Herod was not a happy camper, Herod searched for him, did not find him, he examined the guards, and he ordered that they be led away, and your text it says to execution, which is added, that's not in the original, but, that's the cost for prisoners escaping, most likely they were led away and executed,

Peter was free, but the ruler punished the soldiers, and then it describes, here at the end of verse 19 into verse 20 through 23, describes how Herod returns to Caesarea, here's the setup for his judgment, he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and with one accord they came to him, having one overblastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country, what's going on there, what's happening, he was angry with Tyre and Sidon over the provision of food, he had economic power over them, and so there was disagreement, but an agreement, or peace was reached through blastus, he was the king's chamberlain, so Herod, through this peace, he came over and he delivered this speech to the people, finally peace was made, Luke says, 21, on that appointed day,

Herod put on his royal robe, his apparel, took a seat on the royal throne, and delivered the speech, Josephus writes about this account, he says that Herod's royal robes shined in the sun, he spoke from his royal throne with his royal robes on, and the crowd, they kept crying out, the voice of a God and not of man, and because he did not give God the glory, an angel struck him, was eaten by worms and died, it seems in terms of chronological time, this took place about March 44 A.D., Josephus also records this tragedy upon Herod, he records that there was a terrible disease that struck Herod, he was laid up for five days in major internal pain, and then he died, the exact disease is unknown, but as far as Luke was concerned, an angel struck him, and worms were inside of him, and ate him inside, and he died, well that's a comfortable nice way to die, it seems like though, he was judged, he died for persecuting

Peter, he died for executing James, and he died for refusing to give God the glory, look, God is sovereign over those who conspire against his people, he will glorify his name by death, by life, or by judgment, anyone who opposes his work in his new community will be judged, and that's the situation, that's the truth for any of us who are here and do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, we were there before we knew Jesus Christ, for those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, for those that are not in fellowship with the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ, you will face judgment, all of us should, all of us deserve judgment, and yet God showed his compassion, God showed his grace, God showed his love in Jesus Christ, Jesus who came, he lived, he died for sinners, he resurrected from the dead, and he says repent and put your trust in Jesus

Christ, that's the gospel, are you here and you're not a follower of Jesus, God will judge you, but he's gracious, and compassionate, and he will be to you in the Lord Jesus Christ, come and be saved, it's so true from our passage that God works on behalf of his people, so be careful to go against them, be careful to go against them, he will not give his glory to another, he will glorify his name, friends, but God works, he works in different ways, with different people, but in the end, what is most important is that he is glorified, so let's be a church that fervently prays, expecting God to do great things for his glory, knowing that he will judge his enemies, and he will spread the good news, which leads us to our last points, which brings us full, this way, on our half circle, here you see the apparent hindrance of

[36 : 48] God's word, God's sovereign rescue, he judges, and then point number four, the actual growth and increase of God's word, you have the appearance hindrance, here, his word will not grow, his word is lost, everything is lost, everything is miserable, no, comes this side, the actual growth, the actual increase of God's word, in the midst of suffering, God's word increases and grows, verse 24, but the word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied, Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taken along with them, John was also called Mark, so what happens here, this connects us back to the mission from chapter 11, putting the intention back to Barnabas and Saul, now there was some confusion about translation, so maybe this will help clarify things, Barnabas and

Saul returned having fulfilled their service in Jerusalem, having picked up John who was also called Mark, this reminds us of the prediction Agabus spoke about in chapter 11, the prediction of famine, which actually preceded Herod's death, Herod died in 44 AD and the famine took place a little bit later, 46-47, so they returned to Antioch with John Mark, so when you have this whole thing happening, what does this show us?

It shows us that in spite of the opposition, the word about the goodness of Jesus Christ continues to expand and grow, God's word will never return void, it will accomplish his good pleasure, it did not impede gospel progress, persecution, suffering, set it forward, so you can be confident of that, when you are suffering, God's word is going to be set forward in your life, when you are facing persecution, God's word is going to be set forward in your life, it's going to expand in your life, it's going to be actual growth in your life, not hinder, not setbacks, when there is gospel growth, then, there will be church growth, as he sees fit, God will remove barriers so that the message of his son will thrive and flourish in your life, he enables its growth, he enables the increase, so, imprisonment, persecution, martyrdom, even the death of an apostle, or any kind of suffering, can never, never stop the penetration, growth, and increase of God's good news about the

Lord Jesus Christ, not cancer, not ill health, not a cold, not an unknown disease, nothing, you can be confident, so, when you leave today, you can be confident, the things that you will face this week, the struggles you will face this week, the hindrances you will face this week, the so-called setbacks you will face this week, or month, or the next year, they're just seeming hindrances, they're just seeming setbacks, you will actually see the actual growth and increase of God's word, though it seems, that persecution or suffering hinders God's word, it doesn't, it extends and sets it forward, so, as I said earlier, let's welcome persecution and suffering, and that's hard to do,

I know, I don't like to suffer, I like my chocolate, it, we like those things, let's welcome persecution and suffering, knowing that God uses it to glorify His name and to advance the progress of the good news of Jesus Christ, it's hard, it's difficult, but let's together welcome it, a good time for us to think, let's take a few moments, a few moments of silence for us to think, to ponder what we've seen in God's word this morning, maybe you're suffering today, maybe you're hurting, maybe you're facing persecution, this will be a time for you to just rest in God's grace, rest in God's sovereignty, rest in God's purpose, and that He'll glorify His name in your life, so take a few moments of silence to ponder what we've seen, to be encouraged from God's word, and then we'll have our time of giving, our last two songs, and our closing prayer, think, and ponder.

[41 : 57] startitness Journey