

## *Chapter One*

# YOU SENT HIM TO ME

(LATE JANUARY, A.D. 62)

THE SEA IS A LONELY PLACE WHEN IT STORMS.

On calmer days, the sea draws men into natural community. A ship's crew must work together to trim sails and steer a course. Passengers congregate on deck to share stories and pass the hours in the company of others. There is something about the business of traveling by water that throws men together and binds them in common cause.

But in a storm, every man turns inward and becomes a solitary sailor. Hard winds and high waves drive a man onto the reef of himself. Detached, he must face his own private miseries. Isolated, he must confront his own personal fears. In a storm, though others may be present on the boat, each man faces the tempest alone.



It was storming this day. The ashen skies squatted close to the sea—wind and water locked in tight embrace—with the ship, an unwilling partner, caught between. The gale whipped across the gray swells, taking up foam and spray and hurling them angrily at the boat. Rain blew so cruelly it seemed solid, like small nails, needling exposed faces and piercing the most tightly woven cloak.

The ship bucked and rolled, punching her bow into each oncoming wave, then pausing as if to decide whether to plunge to the sea bottom

## *Trouble in Philippi*

or shed the water from her decks and ride the surface a while longer. She protested audibly in her exertions. The rigging sang a brave working-song, but the timbers of the hull—bearing as they did the brunt of the labor—could manage only an exhausted groan. Staying afloat in this furious sea was killing work.

But the ship was not alone in its misery. Epaphroditus, a Macedonian from the city of Philippi and the descendant of a long line of men who wisely lived on solid ground, knelt on the open deck with his arms wrapped tightly around the railing. Cold, soaked to the bone, and sicker than he had ever been in his life, he was praying—fervently, sincerely—that God would end his suffering and take him home.

Hours before, the first swells of the storm had sent him to the railing in search of relief. Finding none, despite repeated and wrenching efforts, he turned instead to prayer. At first, he prayed for the storm to cease. It raged on. He prayed for some lesser miracle—healing for his stomach or even a momentary lull in the tempest. But God apparently was in no mood for miracles. Finally, with an earnestness only the seasick can muster, he begged for a merciful end.

But the storm blew on and Epaphroditus remained among the living. Leaning as far over the side as his death-grip would allow, the young man made yet another offering to the sea. He felt the rain running down his neck, collecting in every crevice of clothing and body, and filling his boots. He shuddered at the cold. Wiping a wet sleeve across his mouth, he stumbled back to the hatch to plunge below decks again.

A single lantern swung from the ceiling of the cargo hold, throwing shadows around the walls and adding to the sickening sense of motion. It lit, then silhouetted the green faces of his fellow travelers, who looked up as Epaphroditus clambered down the ladder. In his distress, he imagined them to be tortured souls watching another of the damned descend into dark Hades from the gray and stormy world above.

The stench of vomit and urine rose up to greet Epaphroditus, almost persuading him to sit out the storm on deck. But the thought of the rain and wind and plummeting temperatures somehow made the rankness bearable. So Epaphroditus eased himself to the floor, his