

Acts 12:1-25

Prison, Prayer and Worms

Well, we have come as far as Chapter 12 in the book of Acts

A) Seen the church birthed the gospel spreading throughout areas of Judea and Samaria – now into Antioch

B) We've seen some incredible individuals. In chapter 9, we saw a rabbi who **fought God**, and was converted. **His name was Saul of Tarsus**.

1) He fought against God's plan for his life, was trying to fight against the spread of the church from Jerusalem northward into Syria, Damascus.

C) So he fought God and he was converted.

In chapter 10, we read about a soldier named Cornelius who was **A centurion who followed God and he was converted**.

A) He had a belief in God. He went through some of the Jewish rituals, had a basic system of belief,

B) Peter came to his house and shared the gospel and he and his household were converted and received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

C) So we have a rabbi who fought God, and was converted.

1) A Soldier who followed God... Converted

Now, in chapter 12, we read about a King who fought God and was killed.

A) Interesting, Saul fought God and he was saved.

B) Herod fights God and he is slain. And why is that?

1) And you'll see why by the end of this chapter.

C) Work our way through the chapter – point out some lessons or principles

Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church. ² Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. ³ And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring

him before the people after Passover. ⁵ Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church:

Have you ever felt like you have “Hit the Wall” and you are stuck.

A) Perhaps you are overwhelmed by problems with friends, family, a child, Work –

B) If so this Chapter is for you! What we have before us is a story about how a stranglehold of evil began to tighten around the church in Jerusalem.

C) James is murdered. Peter is arrested with a prison DOOR closing behind him.

LESSON #1 What should you do when you find yourself in a crises?

A) Loss of home, Investments, Marriage is unraveling, Prodigal Son or daughter – Illness

B) Whatever the Crises What do you do?

1) What should you do? – The Bible says that you should Pray!

Philippians 4:6-7

⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Here in Acts Ch. 12 we see a bleak scenario – that caused the Church to turn to prayer.

A) Herod had James executed and because it earned him some favor amongst the Jews – He proceeded to Arrest Peter also

B) Herod: There are a lot of Herod's in the Bible.

1) Herod is more of a title: The First Herod is Herod the great

C) Herod the Great was an **Idumean**- Descendants of Esau

Now Herod the Great was not a great person, but he was a great builder.

A) If you go to Israel today, you will see things that were built by Herod the Great.

B) Great Aqueduct - the retaining walls of the ancient temple have Herodian stones.

1) There's things that he built like Masada, and many fortresses around.

C) He just was this incredible builder.

1) But he was a horrible person. It was Herod the Great, who killed all the babies in Bethlehem.

D) He married 10 times. So he had 10 wives.

1) He killed several of them. He killed several of his children, his own sons.

E) In fact, back in Rome, there was a saying that it's safer to be Herod's pig than it is his son.

His Sons ruled in different regions – all with the title Herod

A) Herod Antipas ruled up north in the Galilee region.

B) Herod Archelaus, who was the ruler of a few territories like Judea, Samaria,

1) Herod Philip II ruled in Caesarea Philippi

C) Now one of the wives that Herod the great married that he killed was a gal by the name of Mariamne- She was said to be his Favorite

1) But guess what – she made him mad – and he killed her.

D) He also killed his Son by her Aristobulus-

1) But Aristobulus, had a son named Agrippa -

E) That is who is in power here in Acts 12 – Herod Agrippa I the grandson of Herod the great.

Herod Agrippa I spent time in Rome growing up – he knew Claudias who was the current emperor

A) It was Claudius who gave Agrippa the title King but in reality he was more of a Governor

B) Agrippa knows that his job security with the Romans hinged on there not being any drama amongst the Jews

C) So Agrippa was the ultimate man pleaser and wanted to keep the Jews happy

Now the Jews in Jerusalem saw the early Christians as a threat.

A) Herod decided to kill one of their leaders – James the brother of John

B) It pleased the Jews – v.3 So he followed that up by having Peter arrested

C) So he arrested Peter, put him in prison, delivered him to four squads of soldiers."

1) 16 soldiers. 4 on duty to watch him at all times – Herod isn't taking any chances

D) He is intending to execute Peter but wants to wait until after the Passover.

E) So James is dead and Peter's in prison.

So what did the Church do? – They organized a protest and stormed the Palace! – NO

A) They boycotted all products made in Rome? – NO

B) They signed a petition – No

1) They had a sit in and held up signs – Free Peter

C) They wrote letters to Caesar requesting Herod's removal – No

D) V.5 The Church Prayed – Constant prayer was offered to God!

E) Lesson #2 What the church learned in a new way is that even though doors may close on earth

1) there always remains an open door to the believer! The door to Heaven!

What if we applied that principle to our lives!

A) Joe lost his job, (Not Prophesying)

B) Joe lost his job but constant prayer was made by the church.

1) **Glenda has cancer.** But constant prayer was made by the church.

C) Whatever your problem is, fill in the blank and add, but constant prayer was made- by the church

1) Prayer is powerful – prayer changes things!

D) Doesn't mean that it'll change God's mind, but God somehow God loves to partner with his people to get his will done on earth.

1) And does operate mysteriously-- I don't quite get it all --according to our prayer.

"The shortest distance between a problem and a solution is the distance between your knees and the floor. The one who kneels to the Lord can stand up to anything." -- Author Unknown

⁶ And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison.

How do you sleep in a situation like that?

A) How do you sleep chained to a guard?

B) How do you sleep chained to two guards? when you're going to die the next day?

Bb) I believe that Peter went to sleep because he knew he wasn't going to be executed.

1) You say, well, how do you know that?

C) Herod said he's going to kill him. He killed James. He's going to kill Peter the next day.

Ah, because he remembered Jesus gave him a promise.

A) Let me let me read it to you. I'm reading now the last chapter of the Gospel of John.

After the Resurrection, at the Sea of Galilee, John 21, Jesus says to Peter, "most assuredly I say to you, Peter, when you were younger you girded yourself, and you walked where you wished. **But when you are old,** you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish. This he spoke signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he said to him, **follow me.**" John 21:18-19

B) Now Jesus used some interesting language that Peter never forgot.

1) It said, when you are old you are going to die this way.

C) It has only been 10 years from the birth of the Church –

1) and when Jesus made that statement and Peter is in his early 40's

D) Haven't you heard 40 is the new 30?

E) So Peter is not an old man!

1) So Peter is at rest because Jesus said, I'm not going to die till I'm old. - He is no old yet

Peter goes to sleep, and he can rest because he believes in a promise Jesus gave him.

A) How about you? How about us?

➤ **Lesson #3 we can rest because of the promises that Jesus spoke to us!**

B) Are we going to live lives that lack confidence and certainty because we won't believe the promises of the Word?

C) When you believe them, you can go, good night. It's going to be good. God's in charge.

1) He's on the throne. – Going to Sleep

D) One of my favorite scriptures In Isaiah 26:3, says, "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you. Because he trusts in you."

And it was J. Oswald Sanders who said, "Peace is not the absence of trouble. It's the presence of God.

E) And Peter's living in the presence of God.

So Peter is sleeping and the church is praying

Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, Now Peter didn't know this yet because he is, sleeping.

A) **there's an angel standing by him. and a light shone in the prison;**

B) **And now Peter's sleeping really well, because the light doesn't wake him up.**

1) If a light goes on in the room, I will wake up. –

C) **I am a light sleeper never dream- never reach REM sleep –**

1) my wife on the other hand – heavy sleeper
She dreams a lot – I am always in trouble

D) **Peter is a heavy sleeper too - And angelic light shows up in his cell, Peter doesn't wake up.**

Notice what it says next - and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up,

A) **I love that – hey wake up – jabs him in the side saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands.**

B)How would you like to have an Angelic Alarm Clock – Shark tank- millions

8 Then the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and tie on your sandals”; and so he did. And he said to him, “Put on your garment and follow me.”

I love that verse because the angel is so practical.

A)Get up put on your clothes and sandals – follow me – Practical

B)Lesson #4 for us: God works that way. God does the impossible.

1)But he expects you to do the possible.

C)He does the extraordinary, but he wants you to employ the ordinary.

D)It took a miracle to open the prison doors, but Peter had to walk thru the Doors

E)Jesus multiplied the bread and fish to feed the 5,000 – Disciples were called to pass it out

1)In that case he supplied as they stepped out in faith – not before

My point is this – God does His part – but we also have to do our Part!

A)God sent Jesus to set people free – but you still have to believe and walk in the strength he provides

B)Church is full of Former Drug addicts, Alcoholics, Bondage to materialism – bitterness – fear – ANGER

1)People who have been set free – by the saving power of Jesus – Died and Rose again.

C)You too can know that freedom today as well Jesus did His part – you need to do yours!

A)Your part is to embrace what He did on Calvary Believe in Him – walk with Him

B)Turn from your sin – the pain – turn to the savior

Nail scarred hands – his wounds –

1)Wounds of Love – SET YOU FREE TODAY

9 So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, {Dream? but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they

came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to **them of its own accord;** Don't you love that? The first automatic gate opener –

C) The angel didn't have to push the button. It just opened up. {Market for this and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

11 And when Peter had come to himself, So he's now fully conscious. he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.”

D)So that prayer meeting worked. As Thomas Watson, the great Puritan once wrote,

1)He put it this way, "The angel fetched Peter out of prison. But prayer fetched the angel."

Now this causes a bit of a dilemma

A)I am sure the church prayed for James when he was arrested – but he was killed –

B)They prayed for Peter and he is released – what is the deal ? –

1)God loved Peter more than James right?

C)That is how we feel sometimes – admit it - When one person is healed and the other isn't – Why?

1)God play Favorites ?

D)A person's life ends too early – seems like so much wasted potential – Why Lord?

When I am wrestling with those questions and I do

A)I often fall back on that verse in Isaiah 55:8,9 - “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. 9“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8,9

B)So I have to rest right there. Lesson #5 God is sovereign, he is God, I'm not.

C)I know one day this is going to make sense to me Probably not until heaven – Rest in that

D)They prayed for James and God said no – James time on earth is done

1)They prayed for Peter and God said – Yes – Not through with him yet

¹²So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

Peter shows up at the prayer meeting!

A)The house of John Mark, it is believed, became the headquarters of the early church in Jerusalem.

B)And John Mark is the author of the gospel of Mark.

Which was Peter's account of the life of Jesus

C)This John Mark, told his mother's name Mary.

1)She was a prominent person in the early church.

D)She probably had a large house.

1)Many people gathered together for prayer – fervently praying for Peter.

¹³ And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.

Funny – Peter is left out in the cold!

Rhoda runs into the prayer meeting – all excited – Peter is outside! – Miracle

¹⁵ But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel."

In the NLT – You are beside yourself is – YOU ARE OUT OF YOUR MIND! - GIRL YOU ARE NUTS!

It's easier to get Peter out of jail than it is to get him into a prayer meeting.

A)This is classic – continual prayer is offered – they are praying constantly....

B)But they were not praying expectantly! – OUCH

1)YOU AND ME? – Surprised when God answers? – because -You were not really expecting Him to answer

C)Is prayer a formality ? Or do we pray in faith believing God to answer?

1)Good question to ask ourselves

D)It really speaks to our view of the Bigness of our God! Big God = Big prayers

It also speaks to our belief – God is really with us and for us.

A)Some of us – the struggle isn't – God Big – the struggle does God really care.

B)Too many No's – He doesn't care – James died What is the use?

C)Jesus said: Keep on praying, knocking, seeking

D)So Rhoda says – Peter is outside – they say – you are out of your mind!

¹⁶ Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished.

V.16 They opened the Door! – Humor there – they all got up – opened the Door – AMAZING

A)The answer to their prayer was standing right in front of them and they didn't believe it!

B)We learn from this story that IT IS a Little faith IN A BIG GOD that moves mountains.

C)Word faith movement – Your lack of faith hinders God

1)No faith – God still worked

So they are freaking out

¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James

(James the brother of Jesus) and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

¹⁸ Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter.

No small stir = they were just shaking in their boots.

A) In Jeopardy of the death penalty Soldiers that did not dispatch their duties were killed, in those days.

B) That's what they were looking at, death penalty.

C) No small stir is Luke's way of saying this was a VERY BIG DEAL!

D) What they were afraid of comes into play

¹⁹ But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and **commanded that they should be put to death.**

And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.

20 Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made **Blastus the king's personal aide their friend,** (Trying to get on the king's good side) they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country.

21 So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. 22 And the people kept shouting, **"The voice of a god and not of a man!"** 23 Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And **he was eaten by worms and died.**

Now Josephus, the Jewish historian who worked for the Roman government, in his reports, he mentions this event.

A) In fact, he wrote that it was on the second day of a feast taking place in the town of Caesarea, a feast in honor of Claudius in Rome.

B) Took place in the amphitheater Caesarea, - we will visit on our Israel trip – right on the coast.

C) Josephus writes that Herod Agrippa I put on robes that were a silver foiled cloth,
1) with actually silver on it.

D) As Agrippa spoke - the silver gleamed in the sun.

1) Almost blinding -

E) The sun is gleaming on him. And people say, it's the voice of a man and not a god.

V.23 says, he was struck, "because he did not give glory to God.

A) Josephus gives a little more detail to this-

B) he was in terrible pain, and he died, not on the same day, but five days later.

1) He suffered in agony for five days and then he died.

C) What a way to go though – Eaten from the inside by WORMS!

The Chapter ends very differently than it began - in the beginning Herod is flexing his Kingly muscles

A) Killing James and putting Peter in Prison.

B) In the end – God shows him who the real king is!

King of Kings and Lord of Lords

1) Large and in Charge

C) This chapter also presents an interesting contrast for us too.

In V. 7 it says the Angel struck Peter to wake him up!

A) Then in V.23 it says an Angel – probably the same one – struck Herod eaten by worms...died

B) In both verses the same Greek word is used "patasso," means to strike gently or forcibly.

1) And the meaning differs according to the context.

C) So do you want God to nudge you gently? Or do you want him to strike you, like the bad kind?

1) The ATTITUDE of your heart will determine the outcome of the patasso, the striking.

D) Lesson #6 God RESIST THE proud but he gives GRACE to the humble. James 4:6

24 But the word of God grew and multiplied. ²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

Barnabas and Saul – leave Jerusalem and go back to Antioch. –

A) They take John Mark as an intern – this young man will end up being the cause – break up

B) This dynamic ministry Duo – see later on