

Acts 12:1-19 Unstoppable God

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) Maybe you are just feeling overwhelmed by the pressures of life - the economy

C) If so this study is for you!

D) Reminded to today of how our God is the God of the impossible

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 conversions in the last couple of chapters

C) Chapter 8 Philip leads to Jesus an Ethiopian Official to the queen - out in the Desert

D) In chapter 9, we saw a Pharisee who fought God, and was converted. His name was Saul of Tarsus.

1) We will see him become Paul the Apostle

In chapter 10, we read about a soldier named Cornelius who was a centurion who was converted.

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

B) That was the start of this new work of God that was going to spread through the Gentile World.

C) Then we saw God choose a new City -

1) Antioch which would be the epicenter of this new work among the gentiles.

D) We will come back to that when we get to Acts 13

But today our journey brings us back to Jerusalem which has been the headquarters of the early church

A) The Evil of Hell is about to be unleashed on the church. - But God is going to intervene

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

Here in Acts Ch. 12 we see a bleak scenario –

A) Herod had James executed and because it earned him some favor amongst the Jews –

B) He proceeded to Arrest Peter also

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

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

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 - he built Masada, and many fortresses around Israel

C) He just was this incredible builder.

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

He was married 10 times. So he had 10 wives.

A) He killed several of his wives.

He also killed several of his own children,

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

Now his Sons who survived 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) The Herod who is ruling here in Acts 12 is Herod Agrippa 1st - the grandson of Herod the great.

Herod Agrippa 1st spent time in Rome growing up – he knew Claudius 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

And because the Jews in Jerusalem saw the early Christians as a threat to their religion

A) Herod Agrippa wanting to keep the Jewish leaders happy - decided to kill one of their leaders

B) James the brother of John - was killed

C) V.3 this pleased the Jews - So he arrested Peter, put him in prison,

1) delivered him to four squads of soldiers."

D) That means there were 16 soldiers. 4 on duty at all times to watch Peter-

E) He is intending to execute Peter as well - but he wants to wait until after the Passover.

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

1) This was a Crisis for the early church

So what did the early Church do in this midst of this Crisis?

A) Did they organize a protest and storm the Palace! – NO

B) Did they sign a petition? – No

C) Did they conduct a sit in and hold up signs that read- Free Peter? - NO

D) Did they write letters to Caesar requesting Herod's removal – No

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

What should we do when Crises comes?

A) Make Prayer your first priority!

B) It has been rightfully said- we can do more than pray - but we shouldn't do anything until we pray!

C) Prayer should be our first resort - not our last resort.

D) Doors may close on earth - but there always remains an open door to the believer!

1) The door to Heaven! - through 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

So When you experience:

A) A Crisis - Loss of Job - 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.

Notice a few things about their prayers

1st Focus on the bigness of God and not the enormity of the situation!

A) They prayed to God! We have to understand who it is we are talking to in prayer

B) There is nothing we face that is too big for God to handle.

Twelve spies – 10 saw giants and Power

A) Two saw a giant God! Too big to miss - They are our bread.

B)These giants are the very thing that is going to nourish and build our faith -

1)As we step out believing God for the Victory

C)But The people followed the advice of the 10 and didn't believe –

1)spent the next 40 yrs in the wandering in the wilderness. Perished

Valley of Elah - the two Armies

A)Giant of a man Goliath 9'6"

B)David comes up - who is this uncircumcised Philistine - how come no one wants to fight him?

1)The Army of Israel Saw a Giant – David – saw a Giant God! **Today God is going to deliver....hand**

C)Why did David have such a different perspective?

Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge.

3 There is no speech; there are no words; their voice is not heard.

D)David moved in the confidence of that view of God

Jesus said in Matthew 21:21-22

"Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt,you can say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. 22 And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

A)Now of course Jesus wasn't in the excavation business.

B)He had little interest in relocating a pile of rocks into the ocean.

1)He was using the term mountain figuratively.

C)Whatever mountain stands in your path, whatever obstacle blocks your way,

1)whatever difficulty immobilizes you

D)THE PRAYER OF FAITH CAN REMOVE IT!

E)But the first thing that we need to do is to shift our focus from the size of the Mountain

1)To the Sufficiency of our Mountain mover

2nd Pray with Passion and Perseverance.

A)Constant prayer- that speaks of persistent prayer

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Matthew 7:7-8

B)Keep on asking - keep on seeking - keep on knocking -

1)Persistence speaks of our dependency on God -

C)Don't just ask once and if God doesn't answer - you are going to take matters into your own hands!

Keep asking – keep knocking – keep seeking –

A)God always ANSWERS – Yes, no, wait.

B)Been said - If the request is wrong – God says No!

1)If the timing is wrong – God says – Slow!

2)If you are wrong God says – Grow!

C)If the request is right, timing is right, you are right – God says –GO!

The word constant is also translated – earnest

A)Describes the kind of prayer that Jesus prayed with in the Garden of Gethsemane

B)Prayer of agony – He sweat as it were great drops of blood!

Do you pray with Passion? Or are your prayers lackadaisical?

A)Uh Lord – you know – I was um – or rambling

B)Remember who you are talking to- Almighty God

C)Pray with fervency!

1)There was a fervency to their prayers! Why?

D)James was beheaded – Peter was next

E)So they prayed with Passion and persistence

3rd They prayed together!

A)The Church in Jerusalem was quite large – 5,000 – 10,000

B)Not the whole Church praying – obvious this is a house –

1)But this is a group of them for sure

What if we applied this principle to our lives!

A)Joe lost his job, (Not Prophecy)

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

1)**Brenda 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

D)Prayer chain

1)Prayer is powerful – prayer changes things!

E)What should we do when crises comes?

#1 Make prayer your first priority.

#2 Rest in the promises of God.

Watch what happens:

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 two soldiers

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

C)I believe that Peter's heart was at rest for two reasons - #1 The church was praying for him

D)The peace of God came over him.

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

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

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

I think Peter remembered Jesus gave him a promise.

A)Let me let me read it to you. John 21

B)Jesus speaks to Peter about how he is going to suffer for him -

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 **John adds this footnote.** 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

C)Peter responds - **Lord enough about me** - what about John - how is he going to suffer.

D)Jesus response: Don't worry about John - you follow me - Don't focus on others - Crises - Trust

Now Jesus used some interesting language that Peter never forgot.

A)He said, **when you are old you are going to die this way.**

B)It has only been 10-12 years from the birth of the Church –

C)and when Jesus made that statement and Peter is in his early 40's -**Haven't you heard 40 is the new 30**

My point Peter is not an old man!

A)He is only in his early 50's at this point - and will not die until he is 66 years old - crucified upside down

B)So Peter is at rest and can go to sleep because Jesus said, I'm not going to die till I'm old. -

C)He is resting in the Promise that Jesus made to him!

D)How about you? How about us?

1)We have promises - you know that ?

²⁰ For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 2
Corinthians 1:20

A)All the Promises of God as Yes and Amen = certain - IN CHRIST

B)GUESS Where you are at today? -In Christ

C) Jesus promises to us: Protection

For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."⁶ So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:15

D) Provision

¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

E) Assurance ⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; Philippians 1:6

He is going to see you through to the end

A) The crises will come to pass

B) And God has given us a magnificent promise for our future in the new heaven and new earth

C) Do we grasp the full weight of God's promise that Jesus is the first fruits of the transformation we will experience one day?

D) To the extent that we believe that we will be able to endure the trials we experience in this life

Rest in the Promises of God!!!!

A) 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."

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

C) And Peter's living in the presence of God by resting in the promise of Jesus

So Peter is sleeping and the church is praying

A) What happens next is comical

Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison;

A) Now Peter's sleeping really well, because the light doesn't wake him up.

B) I am such a light sleeper - If a light goes on in the room, I will wake up. -

C) 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.

8 Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; **get dressed - we are getting out of here** and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me."

B) I love that verse because the angel is so practical.

1) Get up put on your clothes and sandals - follow me - Practical

Principle #3 When God does the impossible, he expects you to do the possible.

A) He does the extraordinary, but he wants you to do the ordinary.

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

C) God Parted the Red sea - they had to cross

1) They had to Move

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 - 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.

E) 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."

¹² So, 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. **Who's there** 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! – It is a Miracle

¹⁵ But they said to her, “You are beside yourself!”
NLT — YOU ARE OUT OF YOUR MIND! - GIRL YOU ARE NUTS!

Yet she kept insisting that it was so. **She didn't back down** - So they said, “It is his angel.”

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 I am not sure how much they were believing that God was going to answer.

C)I love this: Their faith was small - and God doesn't hold that against them

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)I wonder if the answer to our prayer might be standing in front of you -

C)You just need to open the door - believe it

1)God did the impossible - now you need to do the possible - open the door

D)Take that step of faith

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*.

Peter was set free -what about you?

A)Maybe you are bound today in some sin - addiction

B)The Bible says that our sin separates us from God - our sin left us doomed and damned

C)There was nothing that we could do to change our status with God

1)No amount of good works - no amount of human effort

But Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves -

A)Jesus did the impossible - He made a way - He paid the price for sin

B)Jesus death on the Cross – paid the penalty for sin

1)Also – broke the power of Sin – Break those Chains

C)Jesus did the impossible - now we have to do the possible - Believe - Embrace

Today we sit here a room full of people SET FREE!

A)Former Drug addicts, Alcoholics, Bondage to materialism – bitterness – fear – ANGER

B)We have been set free – by the saving power of Jesus – Died and Rose again.

C)You too can know that freedom today as well Pray

Believer today: Crises - heavy Trial?

A)Encourage you today - do what the early church did

B)Pray – Fervent, constant - believing God is bigger than your problem

C)Do what Peter did - Rest in the Promises of God

D)Pray together: Today - Pastors Elders - members of prayer team up front - Come get prayer

E)Friend group

Sing this song over us today - Jesus is alive - powerful - still moves mountains - join in the chorus

A)He is the great Promise keeper - Lets seek him church - Prayer come forward - or circle up