

ACTS 12

There is supernatural power released when the church prays for God's kingdom to advance on this earth. What is needed in our nation at this critical juncture in church history is not more programs, seminars, or conferences but a praying church desperate in prayer. Now church programs, seminars, and conferences have their worth and significance but they will not have life transformational power unless they are ordained by God and plugged into God's power source called prayer. When the church decides to drop its own agendas and come together to pray, there is great spiritual power released into the atmosphere. **Luke 18:1** says, *"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart."* Church, if we want to see our country get off our present track of destruction to a period of spiritual awakening & revival – then the church must proclaim the whole Gospel with accuracy, clarity, depth, and truth and the corporate prayer meeting must be rekindled. When Peter (the central person mentioned in this text) in 1 Peter 3:12 quoted the 34th Psalm vs. 15-16 – "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto our prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." That quotation certainly summarizes what God did for Peter here in chapter 12 of Acts and reveals to us 3 wonderful assurances to encourage us in the difficult days of life: (1) God sees our trials (vs. 1-4); God hears our prayers (vs. 5-17); and God deals with our enemies (vs. 18-25).

God hears our prayers (vs. 1-4)

Vs. 1 – King Herod Agrippa had some Jewish blood in him and he was appointed by the Romans to rule over most of Palestine which included Galilee, Judea, and Samaria. His sister Herodias was the one responsible for John the Baptist being beheaded. This king loved to persecute the Jewish people because it pleased the Jewish leaders that opposed Christianity and the king thought the Jewish leaders strengthened his position as king. Notice the text in **vs. 1** says, *"Herod stretched out his hand to harass "some" from the*

church.” When you are living a godly life and trouble is showing up seemingly out of nowhere and everywhere - you must know that your Godliness is a threat to Satan and he will stir up others to try and come after you. You must know when things are going well, when you are being blessed, everyone is not pleased. Some of the greatest moments of spiritual or even material success in your life can produce some of the greatest moments of envy and jealousy for others. But fret not...no weapon formed against you shall prosper...if God be for us, who can be against us.

Vs. 2 – The phrase *“Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword”* ignites a new development in the history of the church. Up to Acts 12, the church had been on a streak of success, experiencing one exciting conversion after another. First there was Saul of Tarsus, then the Gentile centurion Cornelius, then the highly successful work among Gentiles (and Jews) in Antioch. But in Acts 12, the ugly opposition inspired by Satan again raised its head. Of the twelve who followed Jesus, James was the first to be martyred. Now James was certainly not the first Christian to die in faithfulness to Jesus. Stephen (**Acts 7:58-60**) was martyred before this, and certainly others were also. But the death of James shattered the illusion that somehow, the twelve enjoyed a unique “Divine 12” protection. Just because the pastor/ministers/deacons are the spiritual leaders of the church that does not

mean we cannot be touched by the evil people Satan entices to target Bible teaching/preaching churches. In **Mark 10:35-40**, John and his brother James came to Jesus and asked to be considered His two chief lieutenants. Jesus replied to them, *You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?* James and John, not really knowing what they were saying, replied by saying *they could*. Jesus promised them, *You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized*. This martyrdom of James was the fulfillment of that promise for James. John fulfilled it by a lifetime of devoted service to God despite repeated attempts to martyr him.

Vs. 3-4 – Regarding the phrase *“Because he saw that it pleased the Jews”* seeing his increased popularity when he killed James, Herod sought to improve his ratings even more when he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Our text reveals God allowed James to be beheaded, but He allows Peter we’ll see shortly to be miraculously saved - that is called the *Sovereign will of God* - no human can explain but what we know is everything God does is just and He knows the end from the beginning. We’ll understand by and by as grandmother use to say. Evil, in a limited form will be allowed for a season, but we know God has promised to destroy all evil after He Comes back to the earth at the end of the 7-year tribulation in the Second Coming. Revelation

chapters 20 and 21 is the Christians end; it's our eternal victory lap.

Regarding the phrase "*delivered him to four squads of soldiers*"- knowing Peter (with the other apostles) had mysteriously escaped from prison before (**Acts 5:17-21**), Herod assigned a high-security detail to guard Peter.

Vs. 5 – Herod's plans no doubt was to have Peter executed but something happens - the church prays for Peter. When every other gate is shut and locked, the gate to heaven is ALWAYS wide open. We take advantage of that open gate through prayer. The text says not a one and done prayer was offered but "Constant prayer was offered to God for him" - the word *constant* also has the idea of earnest; literally, this word derived from the Greek pictures someone stretching out all they can for something. This is the type prayer Luke uses for the agonizing prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane in **Luke 22:44**. Now earnest prayer has power not because it persuades a reluctant God. Instead, it demonstrates that our heart cares passionately about the things God cares about, fulfilling Jesus' promise in **John 15:7** whereby Jesus says, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you." In **verses 5-11** **Luke** is stressing the church is called a "*house of prayer.*" What an awesome passage this is; when Luke uses the coordinating conjunction "**But**" *this narrative makes an epic swing for our good*. Peter was unjustly in jail **But**

constant prayer was offered for him by the church...it looked like it's all over for Peter – especially, when you reflect on what happened to James. But when God has a plan for you...when your mission and purpose is not complete you can't be defeated. God specializes in delivering in the *11:59:59 hour*. You see for someone today...it may look like you may lose your job *But*...it looks like your child is going to stay in a state of rebellion *But*...it may look like your marriage is over *But*... it looks like you may lose the battle with cancer *But*...it looks like you may lose your mind, lose your home/apartment *But*...don't you give up, no matter what the circumstance you face...if you stay faithful to God's word...if we in the church will continue in *constant prayer* there is a *But* *God answer waiting on you.* *Notice while Peter was unjustly in prison* – *the people were not out looting in Jerusalem destroying their own neighborhood* – *they were not out trying to stone the king's guards* – *they were not out blocking citizens who had nothing to do with Peter being in prison from their day to day life*...*No, the people who wanted to see real change...they went to the Lord in corporate prayer.* And I think in America today – peaceful marches and protest certainly have their worth and significance but trying to *return evil for evil* accomplishes nothing...If we want to see solutions to the issues of life in America, *Republicans, Democrats, Congress,* nor the *Supreme Court* *is not* the final answer...The people who are called *Christian*

because we have placed saving faith in Jesus and have confessed with our mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in our heart God raised Jesus from the dead – we must start with corporate prayer...time is out for simply majoring in the minors...it is God, not Louis Rosenthal who describes the church as a House of Prayer in Isaiah 56:7 and Matthew 21:13...There is a whole lot we can do for kingdom advancement and for social change once we get off of our knees but there is nothing of kingdom advancement we can do until we get on our knees...Our nation is spiritually sick, we've fallen away from God; the hedge of protection around America is falling...but the Chronicler said in 2 Chronicles 7:14...If My people who are called by My name would humble themselves and pray...seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, THEN, I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal our land. The starting point to the solution of race problems in America - the starting point to African American males being shot by police and by their own race - the starting point to this nation turning back to God is when the church rediscovers the corporate prayer meeting. Corporate prayer says, I can't – we can't - But God, you Can!

Vs. 6-11 - Isn't it amazing how the enemies of God recognize the power of God as Herod had one man – Peter being secured by 16 guards (vs. 4 said 4 squads – that means 4 sets of 4 guards). The enemy, when they plot against God's people, know God has power but seemingly the people of God, act like God is

powerless in their trials...the devil is not afraid of humans – the devil is afraid of God the Holy Spirit who dwells within Christians...no Christian filled with the Holy Spirit can be possessed by the devil for greater is He that lives within me, than he that is of this world. Peter was scheduled to die the next day, *he was chained to 2 guards & guarded by 14 other guards* but yet vs. 6 says Peter was asleep...no tossing, no turning...no crying...no eating his last meal...no writing his last will and testament...but he was sleeping...sounds like Peter had learned something from His Master, Jesus...remember when the storm came on the sea and it looked like the ship was going down in Mark chapter 4 it says Jesus was asleep in the stern. Isaiah 26:3 says, *He will keep you in perfect peace if we can keep our mind on the Lord.* Psalms 121:4 says, “Behold, *He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.* So since Jesus knows what is going on and has the power to deliver us, we can have rest. *Man’s extremity is simply and opportunity for God to show us His awesome delivering power if we just call on Him.* Our set backs are merely a set up for God to allow us to make a come back. *Because what the devil means for evil, God means it for our good and His glory.* Now regarding vs. 8-11 - I know most of us have heard the statement “*God does things in mysterious ways*” – look at how God delivers Peter. He is in jail whereby there are 16 guards whose lives are on the line to secure Peter and yet God has one of His angels shine a light in the prison – vs.

7 affirms it was night so don't you think one of 16 guards would have seen the light. Also, the angel caused the chains to fall off – don't you think one of the 16 guards would have heard that sound? In vs. 8 the angel says to Peter, get dressed. The iron gate in vs. 10 opened on its own accord...the Greek word for accord gives us our English word automate. So one could say that the iron gate opened automatically for Peter. Many of us worry about our “iron gate” before we ever get to it...and just like in the text, God will take care of our “iron gate” whether it be a health issue, financial issue, relationship issue – if we surrender it to Jesus in faith God will take care of it by His own accord. *When God gets ready to deliver you, He can deliver you right in the face of your enemies and they can't do nothing about it. God will always do what we can't do but He expects us to do what we can (last phrase of vs. 10 Peter could have been like 9 of the 10 lepers healed...delivered and go on in silence).*

Vs. 12 - Luke is highlighting in vs. 12-17 when God delivers you, you cannot keep it to yourself. These verses remind of what the Psalmist says in Psalm 50:15 - *“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.”* If you're not ready to give God glory when He delivers you from your trials you might not be getting out of your trials anytime soon. Notice what it says in vs. 12 – “Many” were gathered there praying for Peter's deliverance. Based on the condition of this world, billions are unsaved and

may miss the Rapture and then they'll have to endure the 7 year Tribulation that will represent the worst times in the history of the world...at least 2/3 of the world's population during the time of the Tribulation will be killed during the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments of Revelation ch. 6-19...*therefore, since we could be the very generation that experiences the Rapture, I'm still blown away by why corporate prayer meetings are not filled to capacity in every church open in the name of Jesus the Christ.*

Vs. 13-17 - So Rhoda comes to the door and she was so overcome with joy that she forgot to open the door for Peter; so he has to stay at the door knocking while the believers in the prayer meeting decide what to do next. The thought maybe what they were seeing was an angel for the Jews believed in guardian angels - Hebrews 1:14 affirm believers have an angel watching out for us. Now vs. 16 show us that even in some of the most fervent prayer meetings, there is sometimes a *spirit of doubt* and *unbelief*. Mark 9:24 says, "*Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief.*" Now praise God, He answers prayers even if they are prayed with the weakest of faith – God will answer mustard seed faith prayers of the righteous. But these verses also suggest we should have confidence in our prayers...1 John 5:14-15 says, "*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the*

petitions that we have asked of Him.” Regarding **vs. 17**, first you need to know **this James** was the half-brother of Jesus and the inspired author of the epistle of James. And then you need to know when God delivers you and **you know it was nobody but the Lord, you can't keep it to yourself**...We should be quick to testify because when we discover what God has done for others, we can have hope He can do the same for us. Nothing is impossible for God...**He will** dry your eyes – He can bring reconciliation into your marriage...He's able to do exceedingly and abundantly above what we could ask or think.

Vs. 18-19 – Regarding the phrase *“There was no small stir”*- This is one of the great understatements of the Bible. Herod was furious that his prized prisoner had escaped. He examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death: The execution of the guards was customary. In that day, if a guard's prisoner escaped, the guard was given the penalty due to the prisoner – in this case, death. The Jews considered Jerusalem their capital but the Romans made Caesarea their headquarters in Palestine.

Vs. 20-21 – Regarding the phrase *“they asked for peace”* - the people of Tyre and Sidon wanted to make peace with Herod (Herod Agrippa I), the grandson of Herod the Great. Since Herod had been very angry with them, and they needed the food that came from Herod's country, the crowd was motivated to please Herod. The phrase *“arrayed in royal apparel...gave an oration”*

Dressed in impressive clothes, Herod spoke before an audience eager to please him. This verse highlights the importance of who you consider the source of your blessings to be; because who you consider to be your source, is who you will listen to and obey.

Vs. 22-25 – It is as though Luke is using the words of Solomon to describe what happened to Herod. **Proverbs 16:18** says, *“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.”* Herod dies an horrific death; pride is a serious sin to God; **Proverbs 6:16-17a** says, “These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look.” God chose in this case to punish immediately; He does not always wait to bring punishment for sin. We should confess and repent of our sins as soon as the Holy Spirit bring them to our minds. In **vs. 22** regarding the phrase, *“The voice of a god and not of a man!”* It is in human nature to look for political deliverers and messiahs, and the people of Tyre and Sidon seemed to praise Herod as if he were a god. For his part, Herod enjoyed it, taking the glory unto himself (he did not give glory to God). The phrase “He was eaten by worms and died” - the manner of Herod’s death was appropriate to his spiritual state; he was corrupted from the inside out. In **vs. 24** regarding the phrase *“But the word of God grew and multiplied”* - The contrast between Herod and the church was clear. Herod believed he had the upper hand against God’s people, but God showed who

was really in charge – Herod was judged, and the church was blessed. Herod fought against God. He killed James but didn't defeat God's plan. He arrested Peter, but the earnestly praying church saw God rescue Peter and the apostle's work continued. In vs. 25 we see Barnabas and Saul returned from their relief effort to Jerusalem (Acts 11:30), and brought John Mark with them back to the church at Antioch; he was the inspired writer of the Gospel of Mark.