

The Greatness of God in Persecution

Acts 12:1-17 About that time Herod the king laid **violent** hands on some who belonged to the church. ² He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of **Unleavened Bread**. ⁴ And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. ⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. ⁶ Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. ⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. ⁸ And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." ⁹ And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. ¹¹ When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." ¹² When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. ¹⁵ 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!" ¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

❖ Intro



❖ Recap

➤ The Providence of God in Persecution

- If you remember back to Acts 7, we looked at how God was in control even in persecution
 - How He used the hatred of man to spread His message to more and more people

➤ Ch. 11 –

❖ Persecution Continues in the Church

- About that time Herod the king laid **violent** hands on some who belonged to the church. ² He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of **Unleavened Bread**. ⁴ And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

➤ King Herod Agrippa I : Here we have the grandson of Herod the Great, who had his own son killed

- So He would not usurp his throne.
- Little Agrippa was sent off to Rome to be educated and became friends with future emperors
- Emperor Caligula made him King over some territories
- But His childhood friend Claudius gave him all of Judea and Samaria
- So Herod Agrippa was truly the king of the jews in a sense...

➤ The King's grip on his kingship was shaky

- Claudius was not all that popular

- So Herod knew He needed to keep his subjects happy.
- So He tailored to the leaders of the Jewish nation...
- **About this time:**
 - About the time of the famine, and the provision by those in Antioch...
 - This King Herod, laid violent hands on James...
 - Meaning: He took him by force
- **James: The brother of John...**
 - If you remember James and John were brothers.
 - The same John who wrote, 1-3 John and the Gospel of John and Revelation
 - Also this is the same John who was called the beloved disciple
 - This is not James, the brother of Jesus
- **James is likely thrust through the heart with a sword**
 - Executed for believing in Jesus
- **Herod wanted to please the Jews...**
 - Meaning He wanted to please man...
 - He was so wrapped up in power, that he chose to please man
 - More than He wanted to please God
- **The Consequences of Pleasing man:**
 - It usually leads to eternal damnation if not corrected
 - It is a character issues... an issue of the heart, of the Spirit
 - Men who love God, will not look to please men.
 - **When confronted with Sin or a matter of righteousness**
 - They will stand on the Word of God.
 - They will not bend to the culture...
 - **How do we handle the cultural norms of:**
 - Homosexuality
 - Abortion
 - Feminism
 - Ungodly parties
 - Drunkenness
 - Jesus is the only True God and way to heaven
 - **Do we say... carry on... carry on... God loves you**
 - Or do we have enough courage and boldness to say... NO
 - ◆ These things are not godly
 - **There were leaders that believed in Jesus**
 - But they were afraid of the Pharisees so they did not turn to Christ
 - Very sad
 - **Jesus said:**
 - **Matt 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**
 - **Listen Folks:**
 - There is a real place called Hell.... With real fire unlike anything we have ever experienced and real separation from God and every loved one you have ever known
 - And it is filled with people who feared man over God.
 - I am not saying it is always the easy decision to choose God over man
 - I am just saying it is always the right decision
 - And your choice tells you a lot about your heart...
 - **Men and Women filled with the Spirit:**

- Make the choice to follow God over self.
- If you are not making those Godly choices
- You need to examine your Spirit
- And there are many of you in here, right now, that need to do that very thing

➤ **Peter is also arrested:**

- So, as Herod saw how pleasing it was to the Jews, he arrested Peter also...
- **After the murder of Stephen many of the Christians scattered...**
 - And God used that to spread the gospel
 - But not everybody left...
 - If they did, who would reach the lost in Jerusalem and closely surrounding areas
- **We see the apostles for the most part stayed in the “lion’s den”**
 - So Peter is easily found.
- **Peter is arrested around the same time as Jesus**
 - And maybe they were wanting to use him as an example
 - Showing... we did it to Jesus, and we will do the same thing to you...

➤ **If I were honest:**

- **I would say, I long for the days of testing in the church.**
- Where our biggest concerns are the salvation of souls, the building up of the saints, and the safety of the saints.
 - Not when we worry about trivial junk all the time
 - But, when we are about the work of the kingdom
- **It is so difficult to motivate the people of God to live like the people of God**
- **The church today is filled with people who love comfort**
 - People who want to just live in peace till the day they die
 - They do not want to ruffle any feathers or cause any hurt feelings...
 - They would rather sit back in the comfort of their own homes
 - While the rest of mankind slowly slips into hell
- **This was not the way of the early church...**

❖ **The Church Responds in Prayer**

- ⁵So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

➤ **Earnest Prayer to God**

- The early church wasn’t worrying about trivial stuff
- They were praying for the deliverance of one of their leaders...

➤ **Earnest Prayer:**

- Earnest means continuous and eager
- **This was not your regular:**
 - God, Please be with Peter... now what show was I watching
- **This was consistent Prayer**
 - During the time of Passover, a great time of celebration
 - They were praying
 - They had already lost James... they did not want to lose Peter

➤ **Earnest Prayer:**

- **They were locking themselves in rooms**
 - And gathering all over the place...
- **The Church was praying...**
 - I believe the whole of Christianity at that time
 - Was Praying for Peter...

- **Ephesians 6:18** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,
- **Shame on Us Today:**
 - **Starting with me**
 - For not being more concerned with Christians all around the world today
 - Who are suffering at the hands of their persecutors
 - While these jihad type Islamists cut the heads off of Christians in Iraq and Syria
 - We sit back without a care in the world
 - **Shame on us:**
 - God, put it into our hearts to pray for our Christian brothers around the world
 - **We should also pray for our enemies**
 - This is something that separates true Christianity from other false religions...
 - We do not want to kill those who kill us
 - We pray for them, and want them to come to know Jesus
 - **It is the governments job to step in and stop injustices...**
 - We as Christians are to pray and love and share Jesus
- **So, Why Pray:**
 - **Why is prayer their reaction?**
 - There were literally thousands of Christians at this time...
 - Well over 10,000 at this time...
 - Why not all get together and raid the prison and get Peter out
 - And kill a few Romans and Pharisees along the way...
 - **Because they knew that God they were praying to**
 - Was more powerful than anything in the whole universe
 - And they knew Jesus could deliver Peter in the blink of an eye
- **What were they praying:**
 - I was not there, but I can assume it was something like this:
 - Psalm 50:14-15 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, ¹⁵ and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”
 - Psalm 118:5-9 Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free. ⁶The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? ⁷The Lord is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. ⁸It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. ⁹It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.
- **What Sustained their Prayers?**
 - **1) They knew God was listening**
 - *Psalms 145:18* The LORD is near to all them that call on him, to all that call on him in truth.
 - *Proverbs 15:29* The LORD is far from the wicked: but he hears the prayer of the righteous.
 - **2) Their view of God...**
 - They saw and knew the greatness of God...
 - So, lets look at that this morning:

⁶Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. ⁷And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his hands. ⁸And the angel said to him, “Dress yourself and put on your sandals.” And he did so. And he said to him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.” ⁹And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading

into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. ¹¹ When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." ¹² When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

❖ **The Outlook Was Bleak**

- Herod was about to bring him out
 - It was the final hour
- Sleeping between two soldiers
- Bound with chains
- Sentries before the door guarding the prison
- A First and Second Guard
- A locked Iron Gate
- 4 squads of soldiers – (16 soldiers)

❖ **God Can Do Anything – And this is why they prayed...**

- **Look at How God delivered him**
 - **Honestly, it looks like God was trying to show off...**
 - **Saying... bind me in chains... again and again... watch me lose myself from them...**
 - An Angel of the Lord Came
 - Shone a big ol light so Peter could see
 - Woke Peter Up
 - Chains Fell off His Hands
 - Passed the First and Second Guard
 - Opened a Locked Iron Gate
 - Rescued from Herod and all that the Jewish People were expecting
- **Just Like Elijah on Mt Carmel**
 - When the priest of Baal called upon their false God
 - And Elijah poured water all over the wood
 - And God sent fire and devoured it...
- **God is Great**
 - **1 Chronicles 16:25-26** For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be feared above all gods. ²⁶ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. ²⁷ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place.
 - **By His word He created the universe...**
 - The universe ... with all its billions of stars, inside of its billions of galaxies...
 - And one of those stars would burn up our entire planet...
 - God made that
 - **God spoke this earth into existence out of nothing...**
 - God does not just build stuff, He creates out of nothing
 - He causes something that was not formerly there, to be there
 - He calls matter into being
 - **Psalm 19:1** The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
 - **God made the Sun**
 - **He said, I am going to create something to give them light,**
 - ◆ But I am going to place it millions of miles away from them...

- ◆ But they will still be able to see it
 - **I also want it to warm them up... keep them from being too cold**
 - ◆ While its at it, lets use it to grow plants...
 - **He says, I think I want to make oxygen**
 - And He creates enough to sustain a whole planet of people and animals
 - **He says He wants to create some dirt for them to stand on**
 - And precious metals and jewels for them to buy and sell with
 - And He speaks it into being
 - **God says, I want to create these huge creatures that people would call dinosaurs**
 - And He creates them
 - And when He wants to get rid of most of them, He does that
 - **Psalm 33:1-7 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. ⁸ Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.**
 - **God said I want to create a bunch of water...**
 - So He did it out of nothing...
 - And then He says, lets use this water for creatures to swim and grow and eat in
 - Let's use this water to sustain the life of every living creature upon the earth
 - Lets use it as place for them to relax and have fun, they can swim in it
- **God is Great:**
- **Speaking of Jesus, the author of Hebrews says:**
 - **Hebrews 1:2-3 through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.**
 - **God rules over the rulers of the earth.**
 - They think they get to do what they want...
 - And they try to live in power and according to their own ways
 - But God will bring their sinful plans to nothing...
 - **Psalm 33:10-11 The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. ¹¹ The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.**
- **God is So Great, We Can not even begin to scratch the surface**
- We could go on all day about the greatness of God
 - **But We see its greatest display in the Life and Death and Resurrection of Jesus**
 - God made a world that He allowed to sin...
 - Their sin has caused great destruction to the earth and its people
 - Their sin and rebellion brought death and death after death to them
 - **But God being great:**
 - Provided a way of forgiveness
 - By sending His Son Jesus in a miraculous way to live a perfect life
 - And to die as a perfect sacrifice
 - Taking on the wrath of God for those who would trust in Him
 - And even in the death of God the Son
 - ◆ The plan of God worked perfectly
- **In the End, this great God Delivered Peter**
- In a very miraculous way from our perspective
 - But from His perspective, it was nothing more than yawning...
 - There would come a point where God would not deliver Peter on this earth

- Rather He delivered him through death into eternal life

❖ The Church Forgets the Power of God

- ¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.
- ¹⁴ Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. ¹⁵ 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!" ¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

➤ This is crazy isn't it? But don't we do this?

- We pray and ask God to do something
- And He does...
- But then we forget we prayed for it
- Or we think... wow, what a coincidence ... I was praying for this, then it happened

➤ Often times we pray, but we do not believe God is going to do anything

- Now, I do not think they prayed like this...
- I think they prayed in full faith.
- Even then it still surprised them...
 - They were amazed at what God did...

➤ But We Often Pray Without Expectation

- Therefore, we do not expect God to answer
- Why? Because we have a very low view of God...
- The God these people served could answer their prayers...
 - And they knew it, but they apparently did not think He actually would...

➤ Look at this:

- They prayed earnestly for Peter...
- And when God delivers Peter, and he comes to the door...
- Their response was: "You are out of your mind!"
- Then when they saw him, they were amazed...

➤ Let's Start praying prayers like this:

- Prayers that cause us to be amazed when God answers...
 - Where we say... no way... you are crazy... your out of your mind
 - God has answered our prayers....
 - Amazing!

❖ Invitation

- Respond To Jesus Today