

J.J.

WHEN THE CHURCH PRAYS
Acts 12:1-17

Acts 12: 1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

8 Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. 9 Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

11 Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. 13 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

15 "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

Prayer

BACKGROUND

A Christian is not immuned to trials.

Nowadays, there are some preachers that are preaching that when you become a Christian, you will become wealthy and you will always be healthy. But even Peter said, *1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.*

Most of the time, God allows trials in our life to test our faith.

Quote : You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it? . . . Only a real risk tests the reality of a belief.
(C.S. Lewis from the book "A Grief Observed" written after his wife died)

What were the trials the first Christians were experiencing?

a.) They were experiencing famine.

Acts 12:1 "It was about this time..."

What is this time? Remember, reading and studying God's Word is all about context. *Acts 11: 27 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) 29 The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*

b.) They were experiencing persecution.

Acts 12 : 1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

Now, remember this, **God may not spare you from trials but He can protect you from its devastating effects.**

IMPORTANT NOTE : OUR LORD ALLOWS TRIALS SO THAT HIS PEOPLE WILL SEE THE IMPORTANCE AND THE POWER OF PRAYER.

5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

HERE IS AN IMAGE OF WHAT POWERFUL PRAYER LOOKS LIKE.

Etymology : earnestly, in KJV without ceasing “ektenes”, it literally means “stretched out.”

RUNNER Illustration : If you see a runner crossing the finish line, he isn’t running slowly, his muscles are stretched out...it means, it takes all of his strength. That’s the meaning of ektenes – they were praying with all of their being. This people were crying out to the Lord.

LOOK AT HOW GOD ANSWERS THE PRAYERS OF HIS PEOPLE

1. The timing is perfect

One of the things when it comes to studying the Bible is pay attention to words and to events. The Holy Spirit is the Author of the Bible and it is there for a reason and has a purpose in the events of our life.

3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

The Festival of the Unleavened Bread is the time being celebrated when God saved His people from death. Part of the celebration is the Passover.

The Passover : it was the time that God was about to kill all the first –born in the land of Egypt. And He said to the Jews, to take a lamb or a goat with no blemish, cook it and the blood to be put on the side and top of the doorframe. So that when God sees it **Now, we can see all of these were happening during this feast and it was reminding the first church, THAT I AM STILL THE SAME GOD WHO CAN DELIVER YOU FROM DESTRUCTION.**

Application : God did not say that we will not undergo fiery trials but what He promised is He will deliver us from destruction.

Now, let’s also look at another part of God’s timing.

Acts 12:6 “The night before...”

What is the hardest thing when you are praying for something? Waiting for the answer or when God will answer.

Psalms 13 : 1 How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

*2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

One of things I’ve learned from my father-in-law.

“God is never too early nor too late. His timing is always perfect.”

2. The answer is unexpected.

Acts 12:7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

Remember this, you know that God answered your prayers when you only know only He can think of this and what's the proof???....THERE WILL BE SKEPTICS ABOUT IT...EVEN YOUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS, which I will show you later.

But first let's remember.

When we pray there is going to be supernatural intervention. (WAY MAKER)

Song :

Oh, God will make a way
Where there seems to be no way
He works in ways we cannot see
He will make a way for me
He will be my guide
Hold me closely to His side
With love and strength for each new day
He will make a way, He will make a way
By a roadway in the wilderness, He'll lead me
And rivers in the desert will I see
Heaven and Earth will fade but His Word will still remain
And He will do something new today

Illustration : Israelites and the Red Sea (Exodus 14)...only God can provide that solution.

Quote : God can overcome overwhelming situations – Chuck Swindoll

Application : He will deliver you from an impossible situation because He can.

3. The process is effortless.

Acts 12: 8 Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. 9 Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

How do you describe a great singer or a great dancer? Effortless ...that's what grace is all about.

This is how God works when He answers prayers. The timing is perfect. It's unexpected and everything is effortless.

That's how it is with God, HE CREATED THE MOON, THE STARS, THE UNIVERSE...just by His word....EFFORTLESS... GRACE.

Ice-Breaker : If only I could say, "Adobo" ...and there will be adobo in front of me... or "Fried Chicken" and there will be chicken in front of me.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOD ANSWERS PRAYERS?

1. God gets the credit.

11 Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

I love it when we hear about people getting healed and then people say, "Praise the Lord."

Or when people get a job and we say, "Praise the Lord."

Remember this, when your prayers are answered, the one thing you must not forget is the Lord.

Remember, IT'S ALL BY GOD'S GRACE.

2. People are overjoyed.

12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. 13 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

IMPORTANT TO NOTE : I love it that Rhoda (someone should name their daughter Rhoda because she is a good example) BELIEVED IT WAS PETER when he heard his voice EVEN WITHOUT SEEING HIM.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? It means when she was praying, she was already expecting God to answer her prayers even before it happens.

IMPORTANT INSIGHT ON verse 12 –

The church didn't know that Peter was already released but they kept on praying.

APPLICATION : God has already answered your prayer. OUR JOB IS TO KEEP ON PRAYING.

Biblical Illustration : There was this angel who was sent by God in order to answer

Daniel's prayers, now look at what happened.

Daniel 10 : 12 Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. 13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

Remember this, when you pray, God has already has an answer for it. The problem sometimes is there are spiritual forces preventing the prayers to be delivered...OUR JOB IS TO KEEP ON PRAYING...remember in our study, one of our weapons as a Christian in spiritual warfare is prayer...CONTINUE TO PRAY.

Quote : Our prayers have been answered. We are only waiting for it to be delivered.

3. Skeptics become believers.

15 "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

Now let me talk about the "It must be his angel" part.

The first Christians were Jews and the Jews believed that there is a specific angel assigned to us. Now when they said, "It must be his angel." They were implying, "That's the angel of Peter, (meaning he's not with Peter anymore), implying that Peter is already dead."

Now, what must we do when our prayers are answered?

17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

Tell the story of God's grace and power to other people.

S.G.D.