

CP - 2/5/23

Acts 12:5–17 - “The Church Prays, Peter Sleeps, God Delivers”

Sermon Outline

Analogies of being a Christian:

- **Soldiers (2 Timothy 2:3-4)**

Acts is Kingdom Advancement

- Inaugurated in 1st Coming (Already)
- Culminating in 2nd Coming (Not Yet)
- Expanding in the age of the Church
- God's Kingdom advances through the preaching of the gospel.
- The borders of the kingdom are expanding past Jerusalem.
 - Repentance or destruction
 - Breaking the bonds of sin & Satan - transferring individuals to Christ's kingdom
 - Two kingdoms: light/dark, love/hate, hope/despair, life/death
 - Kingdom advancement doesn't come without opposition.
 - families, communities, workplaces

The greatest catalyst for gospel advancement is Christ's soldiers carrying the torch of the gospel into enemy lands.

- You're a soldier! Wake up each day, put your uniform on and carry the torch.
- Remember there is a war taking place all around you. (soul, family, friends)
- God doesn't forsake a church who is devoted to kingdom expansion.

We can be sure of 2 things:

1. We will face conflict in seeking to advance the kingdom.
2. Christ will win! - We don't engage as victims but victors.

John Stott: “Indeed, throughout church history the pendulum has swung between expansion and opposition, growth and shrinkage, advance and retreat, although with the assurance that even the powers of death and hell will never prevail against Christ's church, since it is built securely on the rock.”

In Acts 12:5–19, we see opposition, and the church going to war against it.

- **We see the futility of opposing God.**
- **We see the faith of the soldiers of God.**

We see the church wielding four weapons of war:

I. Unrelenting Prayer (12:5)

- Indicates that Herod's attempts weren't going to work out
- The manner in which they prayed
 - Ektenos/ektenes- medical term describing stretching a muscle to its limits
 - Same word used in Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44)
 - The church poured out the maximum effort they were capable of
- The duration in which they prayed
 - Continuous/without ceasing
 - V. 12 - late night/early morning
- It was unrelenting in both manner and frequency.
- Prayer is a war-time walkie-talkie - “boots on”

- Do you see prayer as a weapon against the opposition of our enemy?
 - Only God can break bondage, bring deliverance, and bring reconciliation.
 - Do we pray for others in this manner? Do we pray for our families?
- But I want you to see something here:
 - Do you think that the church prayed for James? (Name it, claim it)
 - God always answers our prayers, just not always the way we want it or how we want it.
 - Jesus' prayer in the garden... let it pass.... Well, give me strength
 - They didn't abandon their prayer after James' death; it intensified.

II. Unfathomable Peace (12:6)

- Notice the timing - seems like it is the last minute - God's timing
- Notice Peter sleeping
- Notice the word for prison - "dwelling"
- His body was being guarded by the soldiers, but heaven was guarding his heart.
- How could Peter exhibit so much peace in this moment?
 - He trusted Christ's Promise - died of old age
 - He knew God's Word - Psalm 2 - Acts 4:25-30
 - He remembered God's faithfulness in the past.
 - Believers who trust God's promises and past performances usually sleep well.
 - He was where he was by being obedient.
- Peter knew that God wasn't done with him yet. His task hadn't been completed.
 - "You are immortal until God's task for you has been completed."
 - Walking in obedience may not always result in ease, but it does bring peace.
 - Peace in knowing you are where God has planned for you to be. And nothing can thwart his purposes he has for you.
- Peace is a weapon that God gives us.
 - The enemy may harass and try to deceive.
 - "Is it really worth trusting Jesus?"
 - "Look at where you are now. Where is God at?"
- Wield your weapon in the face of your accuser, child of God.
 - I'm not where I am by accident.
 - God sovereignly rules all things.
 - My conditions may not be favorable, but they are always fruitful.
- Philippians 4:6-7
 - There is no doubt that pray and peace are inseparable.
 - We don't live by explanations; we live by promises.

III. Unmatched Power (12:7-11)

- The angel's presence nor the light in the room woke Peter up.
- Chains fell off - Peter didn't loosen them/unlock them. God spoke and they listened.
- Notice Peter thinks he is dreaming - He can't be credited for his escape because it's a deliverance. Only God gets the glory!
- The iron gate opened on its own accord - "automate" - automatically
 - Next time/every time you walk in to Walmart, think of this text.
- Delivered from the hand of Herod and expectations of the Jews
 - Jews were anticipating and looking with expectation.
 - Used in regards to the end times - looking with expectation
- Soldiers, chains, nor iron gates can keep God from setting free the captive.
- Whatever Herod tried to do to keep Peter captive was no match for God who had a plan for Peter's life.

- Paul prayed that we would know that power that is directed toward us who believe
 - Ephesians 1:19–23
 - Notice the power is toward us.
 - Notice it's the same power that raised Jesus and seated Him on the throne.
 - Notice it's far above all authority, power, and dominion.
 - Notice it is above every name (then, now, and later).
- Child of God, we have the weapon of God's power in us and for us.
- He is our weapon.
 - Exodus 14:14 - The Lord fights for us
 - We don't fight as victims but as victors.
 - More than conquerors
- Our God breaks chains, frees prisoners, and humiliates bullies.
- We believe like children, pray like children, sleep like children, and laugh like children.
- We have joyful confidence in the King. We remember who our captain is.
- But we don't always see God answer in power like this he does here.
 - God's answer is always yes - It's the timing that we must understand.
 - Sometimes it's immediately
 - Sometimes it's last minute
 - Sometimes it's in eternity
- Walk in the power that is afforded to you!
 - We don't walk as victims.
 - We serve the God who is victorious.
- Now Peter realizes he is in the street. He must go where he knows the Christians are.

IV. Unbelievable Praise (12:12–17)

- Remember, the church had been praying continually and fiercely for up to a week.
- Notice what they are doing when Peter arrives.
 - They're gathered and praying.
 - They know the time, so their prayers are probably as intense as ever before.
- V. 14 - Humor here - Rhoda realizes it's Peter and forgets to open the gate.
 - Peter is left in the street, the most wanted man in the city.
- V. 15 - "You're out of your mind"
 - She kept insisting - over and over again
 - "It is his angel" - They believed in guardian angels that would appear immediately after the death of the individual.
- They found it easier to believe that Peter had died and gone to heaven than that their prayers had been answered.
- "You expect us to actually believe our prayers have been answered after we've been praying for a week."
- It was so unbelievable that the praying church couldn't believe it.
- The answer to their prayers was standing at the door, and they lacked the faith to open it up and let him in.
- We aren't the first people who needed a bigger concept of what God can actually do.
- Meanwhile, Peter is still outside. His knocks probably increase.
- V. 17 - They finally went and saw him and must have broken out in shouts of joy because Peter has to shush them.
- Do we pray even fiercely yet don't expect God to actually answer them?
- Praise is a weapon even though Peter shushed them from getting too loud:
 - It gives glory to God.
 - It increases our confidence.
 - It fuels obedience.
 - Frustrates our enemies.
 - Testifies to others.

Small Group Discussion:

- 1. What spoke to you in the Bible passage and sermon Sunday?**
- 2. How does the analogy of being a soldier in the army of Christ impact the way you see things? What does it mean to be a soldier in the army of Christ?**
- 3. Why do we pray? How would you describe the manner and frequency in which you pray for someone or something you are praying for? How do we usually respond when God doesn't answer our prayers in ways we think he should? What do we learn from the church in Acts 12?**
- 4. How does it encourage you to see the ease in which God delivered Peter in contrast to the extent Herod took precautions to keep this from happening? How does that impact the way we live our lives?**
- 5. Do you relate to the church in their response to Rhoda telling them that Peter was at the gate? How does our concept of what God can do need to be adjusted? What is something that you have thought too difficult for God to change? How does this passage change the way we pray and believe in the power of God?**
- 6. Just for fun. Do you believe in guardian angels? Why or why not?**