

# What are you Praying For?

Acts 12:1-24

August 23, 2020

**Acts Series: Taking the Message of Jesus' Kingdom Everywhere**

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. <sup>2</sup> He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly **praying to God for him**.

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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."

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. <sup>14</sup> When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

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

<sup>16</sup> But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. <sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. <sup>20</sup> He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

<sup>21</sup> On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. <sup>22</sup> They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man."

<sup>23</sup> Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

<sup>24</sup> **But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.** <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The New International Version. (2011): Zondervan.

## 1. Persecution

Acts 12:1-4

*King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. Verse 1*

### A. Herod - Agrippa

Grandson of the Herod present during Jesus birth

Political and not terribly Jewish

### B. James

Of Peter, James and John (sons of Zebedee)

Clearly one of the core leadership team

Nobody is torn up over this

### C. Peter

Well-guarded and on James' trajectory

Public Trial is more about theatre than justice

## 2. Prison

Acts 12:5-11

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

### A. People Praying

Verse 5

What would you be praying for?

What is Peter's biggest past failure?

What is Peter's biggest current need?

### B. Peter Sleeping

Verse 6

What kind of sleep is this? Exhausted or Peaceful?

How could he sleep at a time like this?

What was he expecting?

### C. Angel Acting

Verses 7, 8

Slow Release

Struck (not just touched) by an Angel

**Struck** πατάσσω (*patassō*) A Greek verb used rarely in the NT. 5 times in the gospels (Mt 26:31, 51; Mk 14:27; Lk 22:49, 50) all with violent outcomes, 3 times in Acts, 2 of which are fatal outcomes (Acts 7:24; 12:23) and one not (Acts 12:7), 2 more times in Revelation Rev 11:6; 19:15 with fatal potential. It has a narrow range of meaning from strike a blow to strike down. The only person who seems to escape any harm from this verb is Peter.  
12:7 NIV, ESV, NASB, NLT, NKJV, Struck; KJV, Smote  
12:23 NIV, ESV, NASB, NLT, NKJV, Struck; KJV, Smote

Peter is responsible to obey and do what he can do

Why Peter and not James?

### C. Slow Realization

Verse 11

What was Peter's expectation?

How did this affect him?

## 3. Prayer

Acts 12:12-17

*when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished* Verse 16

### A. Believers

Verse 12

Mary mother of John Mark – a home owner

Mary hosting a prayer meeting

### B. Disbelievers

Verse 15

Why didn't they expect to see Peter?

What were they praying for?

Disappointments – James – so much potential gone

Peter from the perspective of the history in Acts diminishes

**A. Herod**

Struck by an Angel with a different result

Not struck down for killing believers

A different attitude

Apostles were more careful

Angel strikes Herod differently than Peter

**B. Word of God****Verse 24**

Herod attempts to suppress, Peter is free

Herod takes honour for himself and is dishonoured

Herod want to suppress the Gospel

Growth of the word marks God's hand and will

**How do we know and what do we pray?**

**The early church shows us** that prayer is a vital part of their nature

**Persecution, Prison and Pride** will not derail God's intentions

**Peter** has a deep trust for God's leading even if it was to his death

**Herod shows** us that God's plan succeeds

**Pray for the effectiveness of the word of God and the Gospel**