

Acts
 “Jesus” The Sequel
II.) Chp. 8:5-12 “Witnesses in Judea and Samaria”
11:19-12 Gaining speed over bumps
12:1-25

“Knocking on heavens door”

I.) Intro.

II.) Vs. 1-11 I’m sleeping don’t bother me!

III.) Vs. 12-19a The answer is at the door

IV.) Vs. 20-25 What’s eating him?

I.) Intro.

To get the full grasp of this story we need only go to the fifth verse where we read, “*but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.*” These words form the *context* for the events of verses 12-19 and help create the *contrast* with the end of Herod’s life, verses 20-25. This chapter points out two things:

- **First**, from the Christians perspective there is no magical or mystical approach to prayer. Prayer is communication that is dependence motivated. God hears not only what we believe should happen, He hears and answers the cry of our heart in dependence upon Him. I’m not saying don’t ask for specific things, **ask all you want but realize that the answer lies not in that you asked and believed but rather that you asked the right Person, Who will answer based upon what is best for us!** There is a trust element in prayer but based upon this passage we learn that “*faith as small as a mustard seed*” can move mountains, or open prison doors! So much for the phrase, “*I don’t have enough faith!*” You don’t have to all you have to have is a heart that is dependent upon God.

- **Second**, from a worldly perspective no matter how hard you try, how much power and influence you may have, like Herod, you can not thwart the will of God. Herod believed in his ability, ingenuity and power to get the upper hand on a rag-tag group Christians, who though they prayed earnestly didn't believe God would work yet still Herod was defeated!

II.) Vs. 1-11 I'm sleeping don't bother me!

Vs. 1-2 Luke starts this section with a time line as the events that follow took place when Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass or literally "*to do evil*" against the Church. We know the date of these events to be A.D. 44 as the death of Herod (verses 23) is well recorded in ancient history. All of this took place some **12 years after the resurrection of Jesus** which reveals the tremendous growth of the Church. Religious persecution had done nothing but expand the scope of ministry especially when the chief persecutor, (Paul) becomes a follower of Jesus. All the things they had experienced during those 12 years had been used to develop godly character but this was the first time the Church faced persecution from the Roman Government.

Herod thought in doing this that it would please the Jewish leaders making him popular. James becomes the second mentioned that was martyred but the first of 11 disciples. Peter had been arrested three times only to be released and perhaps the Church began to think that no harm could come upon the inner circle. James and his brother John form a parenthesis around the early church James is the first of the original disciples to die and John will be the last.

Vs. 3-4 Herod went after Peter during the week of Passover and he is in prison awaiting the public trial with a sure outcome, death. It appears that Peter's divine escapes were

well known as Herod puts 16 men in charge of making sure he can't get away. They took shifts of four each with two being chained to Peter himself and two guarding the doors.

This shows us that Herod was not going to take any chances in loosing Peter.

Vs. 5 The action of the Church on behalf of Peter was constant prayer but the question arises as to why they did not do so with James? Perhaps they took it for granted that God would just release James as he had Peter so many times prior. Folks, **when the Lord has been working in our lives doing miraculous things we can start to take Him for granted and then the Lord has to allow us to get back to realizing that we need Him and are dependent upon Him!** The truth is that it often takes a tragedy to get us to seek God!

Vs. 6-11 What is Peter doing on the eve of his death? **SLEEPING!** Is that not great? This might be the first time that we see Peter sleeping that it was appropriate.

- **At the mount of transfiguration he was asleep:** On the Mount he slept because he did not think any thing was going to happen.
- **In the Garden of Gethsemane he slept even after being asked by Jesus twice to stay awake:** In the Garden he slept in disobedience.
- **Here he sleeps in perfect peace:** Peter knew that the Lord said he would live until he was old and then die. He also knew that Jesus loved him and was able to keep him. Can you imagine how it must have blown the minds of those Roman guards? *“Hey how was the prisoner?” “Great, man all he did was sleep!”*

How about it, if you were going to be executed for being a Christian tomorrow would you sleep tonight?

Peter was not only asleep he was **sound asleep according to verses 7-8:**

- An angel **shines a light on his face** and he still doesn't wake.
- Then the angel **pokes him on the side and even has to say, "Get up quickly!"**
- Next as Peter gets up and starts fumbling around the angel **has to tell him what clothes to put on and to tie his shoes.**
- Finally after all this as he follows the angel outside he is still not sure whether this is a dream. They pass through the two outside guards, by two doors and when they get to the big old Iron gate it opens like a department store automatic door and only when they are a block away in the brisk air does Peter come too.

What is interesting to me is though the Lord through an angel released Peter he still had to act on what the angel did even if he was not sure if it was a dream. Listen up saints, **far too often we remain entrapped in sin or imprisoned by something waiting for the angel of the Lord to come expecting to be carried out of bondage instead of following the Lord out of prison like Peter.** You may not be able to figure things out like Peter but one thing's for sure you will never find your way out sitting in your cell chained to the world! Take a chance and follow the Lord, you will never know what lies behind the walls unless you go.

III.) Vs. 12-19a The answer is at the door

Vs. 12 Realizing that "*the Lord had brought him out of the prison*" Peter new he was going to be on Herod's most wanted list so he decides to go to John Mark's house. Look at the second part of this verse as it says that, "*many were gathered together praying.*" Peter had been in prison for almost a week and during that time the Church had been in

prayer for his deliverance. In fact when Peter came to John Mark's house they were in a prayer meeting for his deliverance. During this week long prayer meeting **three things were accomplished on Peter's behalf:**

1. **It delayed the crisis:** Peter was put in prison to be put to death but their prayer delayed his death as many days pass. Folks it seems to me that **prayer has the ability to postpone that which we fear.** **"LIFE IS A CRISIS"!!!!** But prayer has a time element that causes things not to be as urgent or desperate as we may have thought they were at first. They started out praying, *"Oh God they are going to kill Peter now just like they did James, help."* But as the days passed they prayed, *"God deliver Peter some way!"* Some times all we need is a few days to get a better perspective on the crisis.
2. **It brought about a peaceful heart:** They were praying for Peter's safety and rescue but God had already given Peter a super-natural peace right in the midst of the situation. Saint's listen carefully; ***God does not always first deliver us OUT OF the situation but promises that He will always deliver us THROUGH the situation.*** I have a little saying I found of that goes like this, **"God does not create joy by new surroundings; He creates new surroundings by joy!"** Folk's, prayer calms the anxious heart!
3. **It changed the situation and circumstance:** Unknown to those that were praying God had changed the circumstances to which Peter found himself. Truly God is able to do *"exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think."* (Eph 3:20) Folks, **we have a tendency to think and pray within the**

**box but we pray to a God who created the box and knew of the Box's
existence forever!**

Vs. 13-16 Rhoda, whose name means “*rose*”, is the only one in the story who responded correctly. She was most likely the youngest believer at the house but **chooses not look at the situation to determine who God is but rather uses who God is to determine the situation.** It was customary in those days to knock on a door and announce your name. So when Peter did this Rhoda recognized Peter's voice, but instead of opening the door to let him in she runs off to tell the others that their prayers have been answered.

I can just picture this young servant girl bouncing all over the place with excitement in a room full of somber mature Christians who are praying: “*Lord, we beseech You now on our fourth day of praying. Please, Oh God of all mercy, deliver him from the bars of oppression and bring him back to us!*” Then you hear, Rhoda blurt out, “*Peter, Peter he's....*” “*Quite Rhoda can't you see we are praying for Peter's freedom what's gotten into you?*”, Comes the reply. “*Yeh, I know but he is right out side.*” “*That's not funny, Peter has been sentenced to death and tomorrow he is going to lose his head and your making jokes!*” Bless here heart as it says in verse 15 that she kept on insisting that Peter was really out side. Seeing that she was serious they thought well, “*Maybe it's his guarding angel.*” Now think about it Christians, if it was Peter's guardian angel why did he need to stand at the door and knock and why didn't this angel take Peter?

Vs. 16 Peter is still outside knocking on the door and whispering for fear of drawing attention to himself, “*Hey guy's it's me come on let me in!*” So they all come together to answer the door and when they see him they are blown away and are so loud that Peter

who is still outside in the courtyard has to motion with his hand for them to be quite for fear that Herod's men will hear them. Remember that:

- Many were praying in earnest
- They prayed day and night for days
- Their prayers were centered around the deliverance of Peter
- And when Peter shows up in answer to their prayers they would not open the door to let him in.

The fact is, Peter had an easier time getting out of a well guarded prison chained between to Roman guards then he did getting into a prayer meeting on his behalf! Oh dear ones, how many times has the answer to our prayer came right up to our door and we refused to believe it? **All we need to do is go to the door and open it!**

Notice this dear ones:

1. Rhoda gave thanks at the answer of prayer when she **heard** the voice of Peter.
2. The rest of the house gave thanks as they **saw** the answer of prayer in the face of Peter.
3. Ah, but how much better would it have been if they began to rejoice and give thanks **the moment they began to pray** because they knew that God **heard** their voice and **saw** the situation?

Had they given thanks to the Lord in prayer they would have been focused on *the Lords ability to answer prayer not their ability to ask and believe.* Prayer first and foremost ought to change the one who prays!

Vs. 17 After Peter quiets the prayer meeting he tells them how the Lord brought him out of prison and instructs them to tell James. This is James the ½ brother of Jesus, who at

this time was the acting head of the Church at Jerusalem as we shall see in Acts 15. Peter quickly leaves the area but we are not told where and fades from view in the book of Acts as the focus of Luke's writings becomes more of the gentile Church. He appears some time later at the council gathered to debate whether or not the gentiles need to be circumcised to be Christians in chapter 15. Then in Gal. 1:19 we are told that he had an extended stay in the Church at Antioch but that Paul had to confront him to his face, as he was eating only with the Jewish believers who had come up from Jerusalem. Lastly we are told that, according to 1 Cor. 9:5, 1 Cor 1:12 he traveled with his wife and apparently visited Corinth.

Vs. 18-19 As soon as day broke there was a great turmoil about what had become of Peter. So Herod was searching for him and examined the 16 guards putting them to death instead of Peter. The Roman law was that if a guard allowed a prisoner to escape then whatever sentence was upon the prisoner was now upon the guards. So clearly Herod's intention was to kill Peter and bummed at the escape of Peter Herod heads down to Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea.

IV.) Vs. 20-25 What's eating him?

Vs. 20 –23 As a postscript Luke tells of what happened to Herod. We are not told of what got him angry at the two seaports on the Phoenician coast of modern day Lebanon but he was furious with them. They lay outside his jurisdiction but he supplied them with grain mainly from the Galilee region so he stopped trading with them. The Jewish historian Josephus writes of this very event saying that the day all this took place was on a day when there was a celebration for Caesar who was a personal close friend. On the second day of the celebration Herod came out looking like Elton John in a robe made of silver

that shown in the early morning sun light. Evidently he had set up his throne at the huge outdoor amphitheater and as he rose to give a speech the people wanting to placate him started shouting, “*The voice of a god and not of a man.*” Herod did not rebuke them nor reject their flattery instead felt a sharp pain in his side and said, “*I, a god in your eyes I who am called immortal by you, am now under the sentence of death.*” Five days later he died. Luke says here that worms ate him and as a doctor uses a word for worm that describes a specific head structure of a tapeworm. This particular tape worm grows to around 16 inches and attaches it’s over a million eggs on the right lobe of the liver forming a cyst as the worms develop inside the cysts then rupture it which causes a painful death.

Hey folks pardon the pun but this story makes me realize that apart from prayer a lot of things can *eat at us*. We can be eaten up with the:

- *Worm of anxiety and fear*
- *Worm of bitterness and anger*

There is a treatment for what’s eating you, it’s give it to Jesus! If we don’t you are going to drop dead one day.

Vs. 24 – 25 Luke closes the chapter with a contrast between the way of the world and the way of God. “*he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God grew and multiplied.*” Notice what grew and multiplied, “***the word of the Lord.***” It doesn’t matter how powerful a person is, or how rich and famous they are it’s foolish to think that you can live apart from total dependence upon God. Lastly we are told that Barnabas and Paul come back to Antioch and they bring back with them John Mark his cousin. Now next week we will launch into the first full missionary journey.