

Open The Door!

My apologies to the folks that attended the Homecoming service this past Wednesday evening, in person or on line. In our conversation on the book of Acts Pastor Sarah and I covered Acts 12. I had been praying about the message for this morning and Thursday I just couldn't get away from this thought in Acts 12. I'll say Wednesday was the acoustic, unplugged version, the conversation – this morning is the amplified, “preachier” version. I just feel God has a word for someone, so we are going to look again (for some of you) at Acts 12.

Just a quick summary. Herod Agrippa I is the king at this time, grandson of Herod the Great. Remember James and John, called the Sons of Thunder, two of Jesus' disciples and part of the trio of Peter, James and John? Herod has that James beheaded and seeing that it pleased the Jews he had Peter arrested and held in prison, intending after the Passover to have Peter publicly tried and executed as well. While Peter is in prison the church is praying for him and for his deliverance. The night before he was to be brought to trial and executed, Peter is sleeping, chained to two soldiers with two more soldiers guarding the cell door and twelve more soldiers guarding the various gates in and out of the prison, when an angel awakens Peter and miraculously delivers him from the chains and leads him out of the prison. Now free, the angel disappears and Peter goes to the house of John Mark's mother, Mary where a group was praying for him. Peter knocks on the door and when the servant girl Rhoda heard and recognized his voice, instead of opening the door, she ran to the others and said “Peter is outside knocking on the door!” Remember they are praying for Peter, for his deliverance, and yet they refuse to believe it's Peter at the door and instead, told Rhoda she was out of her mind. After arguing with her, some suggesting perhaps it was his angel meaning he was already dead, they finally muster the courage to go open the door and low and behold, it really is Peter, alive and free. After giving them a message for the other James, he slips away. That's the story in a nutshell. Now let's go back to the beginning and let me make a couple of observations.

“King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword...he proceeded to seize Peter also. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each...So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.” Acts 12:1-5

James is dead. No doubt the church had been praying for James but they didn't get the result they prayed for or expected. It's a mystery to us, why bad things happen to good people, why someone like James who is faithfully serving the Lord has his life cruelly ended by a tyrant. How could God let this happen? And why would God let James die but then deliver Peter? That isn't fair! Can we trust the Lord when things happen that we can't understand? Consider this: **Trust in God is based on His character and not on perceived outcomes.** We can trust him because he is God and he is faithful, he is holy, he is good, he is compassionate, even when the circumstances, even when the outcome is not at all what we expected. It may seem horrible, hopeless, but remember our perception may be skewed and limited. It may yet turn out for our good. Regardless of what we see at the moment, we can trust him because we know he is loving and good and he has a meaningful purpose for our life. We sing, even when I can't see it, he's working. Trust his character and not the outcome. He is still working.

The church prayed, but James still died. Now Peter is in prison awaiting a similar fate but what was the church doing? Praying. Again. Here is one of the things I felt someone needed to hear today. **Even though you didn't get the answer you wanted, pray again!** "I prayed but God didn't answer my prayer!" You mean he didn't give you what you wanted, what you were asking for." Regardless of the outcome, God still tells us to pray, to ask, seek and knock, to pray and believe. Life disappointed you, God disappointed you, things didn't turn out the way you hoped, or prayed, or wanted, but don't stop praying. Pray anyway! Pray again!

The church could have said, "We prayed but God let James be killed so that's it for us. Prayer doesn't do any good." Instead, we read, "Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him." In spite of the past, in spite of James's death, the church was praying again. Pray again!

Pray because the bible tells us to pray. **Prayer is obedience!** Pray because prayer brings us into the presence of God. We are talking to God and he is listening. **Prayer is relationship!** Pray because in prayer clarity comes, peace comes, wisdom and direction comes. We find resolution in prayer as we surrender to the Lord's plan and purpose. We find the strength to pray as Jesus did, "not my will but thine be done". **Prayer is resolution!** Things are settled in prayer! With James dead and Peter in prison, the church is finding a resolve as they prayed. "We are going to serve the Lord anyway. We are going to pray anyway and trust and obey, regardless of what the outcome might be." "But James died." I know, but pray again. Pray anyway. "But the

storm is getting worse.” I know, but pray again. “But my spouse left and I don’t see any hope.” I know, pray again. “But my child’s addiction is getting worse.” I know, but don’t stop praying. Pray again. “The cancer is spreading.” Pray again. “My prayers haven’t been answered.” Pray again. Pray anyway, because prayer is obedience, it’s relationship, it’s resolution. Keep praying. If you’ve stopped praying because things didn’t turn out the way you expected, pray again! Pray, because it’s not conditioned on the outcome, or how you feel, it’s about who you are talking to! It’s about God our Father, his presence, his character, his integrity, his greater will, his plans, his favor, knowing him. It’s time for you to pray again.

“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.” Acts 12:6

Unless there is a miracle, Peter will likely be executed the next day. (Notice God’s last minute rescue and timing. “You couldn’t have done this sooner?”) Instead of lying awake, worrying, crying, he is sound asleep. How can this be? **Peter was surrendered and settled in Jesus.** Listen, if you’ve surrendered your life to the Lord, you are committed to him, you’ve prayed and you know others are praying for you, you can rest in the Lord, commit it all to him, you know it’s settled in Jesus and you can go to sleep! Even if you are sleeping chained between two soldiers. Peter knew the worst that could happen tomorrow would be he would be executed and as a result he would be home, in heaven and with Jesus again. When you know who you belong to, when you know you are surrendered to Jesus, you know he is keeping you and things are settled in Jesus, you can go to sleep and rest in Him. Surrendered and settled in Jesus!

In John 21, Jesus had indicated to Peter that he would die by execution. Perhaps Peter thought this was it, now was the time. On the other hand, Peter had been supernaturally delivered before from the public jail in Jerusalem in Acts 5:19. “Maybe the Lord will deliver me, if not, I’m still going to trust him with my life. I’m surrendered and it’s settled for me.”

Listen, someone needs to hear this. You can rest in Jesus, trust him and if it is God’s will to deliver you, not even four squads of Roman soldiers holding you inside a Roman fortress can stop the power of God from setting you free. Trust him. Rest in him. He still does the impossible. If you’re living in obedience to the Lord and his word, you’ve got nothing to fear!

“‘You’re out of your mind,’” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, ‘It must be his angel.’ But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.” Acts 12:15-16

They, the church members and leaders, the people who were praying fervently for God to intervene on Peter's behalf, told Rhoda she must be out of her mind to think Peter was knocking on the door. "He's in Herod's prison." From the first century church on, we've all been guilty of it, praying but having little faith or expectation of God answering our prayer. "Lord, deliver Peter." "Peter's here." "That can't be, he's in prison." Someone suggested it was his guardian angel, meaning Peter was already dead. (Why would an angel bother knocking? Angels just walk in!) The question in my mind is, why were all of them hesitant to open the door? Perhaps Rhoda failed to open it out of shock and excitement, but why didn't the rest of them rush to the door and open it to see who was there? This question is one of the main reasons I believe the Lord prompted me to preach this message. I want to ask you, **What's preventing you from opening the door?**

Maybe they were hesitant to open the door because last time things didn't turn out so well. The last time someone knocked at the door late at night, it was Roman soldiers arresting James and taking him to jail. The last time someone knocked at the door, it was a church member coming to tell us James had been executed in spite of our prayers! The last time someone knocked, they were coming for Peter. We're afraid the knock at the door might be more soldiers, more arrests, more trouble.

What's stopping you from opening the door? Someone is knocking. Maybe it's the Lord, maybe it's the answer to your prayer. You've been praying, why doubt? Maybe it's God's provision, it's this brand new opportunity the Lord is providing. Open the door! "But I don't know who or what's there and you remember last time. Remember how it turned out? I prayed but you remember what happened." Fear, scars and disappointment from the past are paralyzing you, keeping you from opening the door. You're suffering from PTSD, you're expecting the worst, but you're starting to pray again, to trust again, it's time to open the door!

Verse 16 says when they opened the door and saw Peter they were astonished! They could have hidden inside and Peter would have finally given up and gone elsewhere. Their fear would've caused them to miss the miracle. I don't know who this message is for and I realize it's not exactly an expository sermon, but I'm talking to someone who's suffered loss and disappointment and you've been afraid to pray again and to trust God again. You've been afraid to open the door because you didn't want to risk being hurt or disappointed again, but God has been nudging you, whispering to you, maybe even shouting to you at times. He has been calling

you to himself. He has been calling you to pray again and he has been knocking at the door. This morning, I'm encouraging you to open the door to him.

Jesus said, **“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.” Revelation 3:20** Jesus is knocking like Peter was knocking, waiting for someone to answer. It looks like a group of them went to the door together. “Let’s face it together. If it’s bad news, let’s open the door together.” They opened the door and were astonished to find the answer to their prayer standing right in front of them. Trust again. Pray again. Open the door again and see what God has for you this time. If you will trust him, things have a way of turning around.

Sarah and I ended the study Wednesday night pointing out that Acts 12 opened with James dead, Herod riding high in triumph and Peter in prison. Acts 12 ends with Herod dead, Peter free from prison and verse 24 says “the word of God continued to increase and spread.”

Don’t give up. God may be turning things around for you and in your life. That’s why he is knocking at the door. Pray again. Don’t be afraid to take the next step of obedience and open that door. Don’t let anything keep you from opening the door to all God has for you.

I want to pray for you this morning. Someone, you’ve stopped praying, you’ve stopped asking, you’ve stopped trusting. You’ve been disappointed, but now it’s time for you to pray again. It’s time for you to surrender to Jesus and to settle things with the Lord.

For someone, the Lord is knocking but you’ve been afraid to open the door to him, afraid to open the door to the next thing, the next season, afraid to see what God has for you. Stop being afraid. It’s time for you to open the door! Trust and obey!