

Acts 12:1-25

“Peace Through Prayer”

We’ve noted as we’ve gone through the book of Acts various pivotal points in church history, ch 12 hinges us on another pivotal point, not so much in church history, but upon the focus of the book personally. So far the primary person overall that the book has focused upon is the apostle Peter. Now obviously we’ve seen other individuals such as Barnabas, Stephen, Philip, we’ve been introduced to Saul of Tarsus, but *primarily* Peter has been the one that the book has chronicled. Ch 12 is no exception to that, but the reason I say that this is a hinging ch, or a pivoting point, is because it’s the *last* ch that will. After ch 12 the focus shifts to Saul who will be called “Paul” from that point forward and we’ll begin to see some of the exciting/amazing ways that God used *his* life.

Ch 12 is sort of a “meanwhile” scene in that when we left off in ch 11 Saul and Barnabas had received a collection that they were transporting from the church in Antioch to the church in Jerusalem that they might minister to them in their time of need since they had been impacted significantly by a certain famine that they were all experiencing at that time. and Ch 12 picks up on that thought and share’s with us a little more of what was happening around that time in Jerusalem concerning the church and the goings on there. Which as I said will primarily pick up on a particular event in Peter’s life, and ch 12 (along with other things) reveals to us at least 3 things predominantly as it pertains to Peter’s plight/predicament. and They are #1 God sees our problems.

Peter finds himself here in quite a quandary, and sticky situation at best, yet God is privy *to* it, perceptive *of* it, it does not escape His attention. Perhaps you find yourself in a bit of a sticky situation, don’t be discouraged, God is very much aware of it. and Peter would come to realize that which we find ourselves repeating here over and over again that when it seemed like all of his circumstances were *out* of control, God was still very much *in* control.

The same is true for your life and for mine. #1 God sees our problems, #2 God hears our prayers, it’s interesting that it was Peter who quoted in his 1st epistle that portion there in Ps 34 when he said, “*For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.*” 1 Peter 3:12 Perhaps he was recalling this event in his heart as he was exhorting his readers not to return evil for evil and suffering for righteousness sake. He could testify personally of the fact that the Lord kept a close watch over His own, and that His ear attended to their prayers, that He is able to deal with His enemies, and deliver or defend His own. Which lead’s me to #3, #1 God sees our problems, #2 God hears our prayer, and #3 God is able to deliver His people and deal with our opponents. Ch 12 shows us that we’re not (as believers) going to enjoy general amnesty, or immunity from problems and trying predicaments, God will use those things to develop godly character in us, often times as a byproduct of trying times we learn exactly how spiritual *we’re not* and how much more we need *to* grow in Him, how desperately we need to cling *to* Him.

The bible teaches us that even Jesus learned obedience by the things that He suffered. Think about it, how else does one truly learn what it means to obey? When I agree to do something I enjoy, that's not really obedience, that's committing to good times, no discipline there, sign me up! But when it's something that's trying to me, or hard on me, something that's difficult to tolerate yet because I'm under authority I endure under it, then I've been obedient, truly, there's no missing the message of obedience that's been sent in such times. So though we'll undergo difficult days and trying times, God sees our problems, He hears our prayers, and He is able to deliver His people, and deal with our opponents. It's ours to simply trust *in* Him, cry out *to* Him, and remain obedient *before* Him come what may into the equation of our lives. It's the Roman's 8:28 thing, it's ultimately going to work out for our good, and His glory because we love God, and have been called according to His purposes.

Vs1

I don't know that it would be a detrimental thing to your theology to not really be overly aware of the fact that there are all kinds of "Herod's" in the bible. So when you read of "King Herod" if you're not careful you'll begin to wonder how long this guy lived. "I mean, wasn't it king Herod who tried to murder all the male children 2 and under when Jesus was born?" Yep, "Wasn't it Herod who had J.B. beheaded, and played a part in Jesus' trial?" Yep, "and Now here we are and Herod is harassing the church some 10yrs plus after the ascension of Jesus?" Yep, "How long did this guy live?" But in reality each of those guys were different Herod's, the one mentioned with Jesus' birth was Herod the Great, he was a paranoid who killed even several of his own wives and sons because he was afraid that they were trying to take his throne from him. There was a phrase going around then at one point that it was safer to be Herod's pig, than his son. But before he killed one particular son, he managed to give him a grandson, which I'll spare you the history of, but suffice it to say that *this* Herod is Herod Agrippa the 1st, who was the grandson of Herod the Great, the Herod who beheaded J.B. was this guys uncle Herod Antipas, so bloodshed and murder runs in this guys family.

Later on Paul will stand before *this guy's son* Agrippa the 2nd, so there's several Herod's running around in the pages of scripture. and Generally speaking they're a corrupt bunch, Edomites, however this Herod was 1/2 Jew, so the Jews didn't despise him as bad, and he was very ritualistic with regard to Jewish traditions, he offered sacrifices and whole bit. and The idea that's developing here is that in order to increase his public approval rating in the poles, he began to persecute the church. We've been reading of thousands who've come to Christ, but they're still the minority, *and at this point* (especially since the acceptance of the Gentiles) a hated bunch of people by the Jewish traditionalists, those zealous for the law and all, and so Herod begins to persecute the church for political reasons. He wanted to convince the Jewish people of his loyalty to the traditions of the fathers.

Vs2-4

Though James is by no means the 1st to lose his life for the sake of Christ, what makes his death distinctive is that he's the 1st of the 12 apostles to be martyred. The 1st of the 12 who actually/physically followed Jesus, as of late the church seemed to have been on a "role" experiencing one mind-blowing conversion after another. Saul of Tarsus, Cornelius the Centurion Gentile, the Jews and Gentiles in Antioch, but now the ugly head of opposition inspired by Satan raises itself up once again. and with the death of James any illusion that may've existed up till this point that somehow the 12 perhaps enjoyed some form of unique Divine protection would've been certainly shattered. and You would've thought that if *any* of them would've received some form of special protection, certainly James would've been one of them. You remember James, he was one of the 3 in the inner circle of the inner circle that Jesus had. It was always Peter, James, and John who would for some reason be pulled aside by Jesus to witness certain spectacular things that none of the others would get to see. The Mt of transfiguration, the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead, Jesus agonizing in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was privy to what was otherwise at that time "classified" information. But Jesus never promised any special protection for even His closest followers, but rather He warned us all to be ready for persecution. He said, *"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."* Matt 10:16 He said, *"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."* John 15:20 So Jesus never promised that He would *prevent* persecution, to the contrary He said, "Be *prepared*" for it.

Perhaps you recall that one day James and John, well they wanted to ask something of Jesus, but they weren't sure how so mom did it for them. The "son's of thunder" deep down in there were momma's boys. But there in Matt ch 20 she approaches Jesus and asks that her boys would get to sit on thrones on either side of Him in His kingdom. and We read there that, *"Jesus answered and said, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' So He said to them, 'You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.'"* Matt 20:22-23

So Jesus prophesied and actually told them that they would suffer and be persecuted for their faith, and here we see the fulfillment of that in James. Of course John would be persecuted repeatedly for his faith as they tried to execute him, but he just wouldn't die, because God wasn't finished with him yet. But Jesus told them of their suffering, their persecution, so up till this point its just been a matter of when, James was beheaded because of his love for Christ.

When Herod saw that his approval ratings went up in the public polls after that he proceeded to arrest and imprison Peter. Or to understand that another way, Herod was a “man pleaser.” Whatever it took to gain the affirmation, and approval of man, but the bible is clear that if you’re bent on being a man pleaser, you can’t be a God pleaser, and if you’re bent on being pleasing to God, you’re not going to be pleasing to man. So now you have a choice, the approval, acclamation, and affirmation of man, or the praise, approval, and affirmation of God. Which do you truly desire, one you can have right now, the other eternity will bear out. Herod finds himself in the category that Jesus placed the Pharisees, who loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God, but mark my words that choice will be a snare to your soul. Don’t occupy yourself with what *people* think of you, what your *reputation* is and all. Occupy yourself with what *God* thinks of you, and make yourself of *no* reputation, then you don’t have to worry about it, that’s what Jesus did, made Himself of no reputation. Just lived a life of humility, always doing those things that *pleased* the Father. Now if what you do as unto the Lord pleases people at times, praise the Lord, but let what you do be motivated by the Love of God, not the praise of people.

Herod arrested Peter, placed him in prison and after Passover was complete, he was going to bring him out and execute him. Remember he’s a politician, he’s not going to disrupt the feast and risk a riot, plus he wants to observe the tradition himself, he’s seeking to please the people. Not only that a trial and execution now would be a distraction, he wants the full attention of the people. Jesus was crucified on Passover, but that wasn’t originally what the religious leaders wanted, but God was forcing the cards because Christ was to serve as God’s Passover Lamb, slain for the sin of the world. with Peter such is obviously not the case, so in standard protocol they wait until the feast is over. But Herod kept him under heavy guard, you recall that Peter had mysteriously escaped prison before with the other apostles back in ch 5 and he was seeking to see to it that that wasn’t going happen again. So he placed him under round the clock security, 4 soldiers assigned to him personally, changing the guard every 6 hrs, and he was chained to 2 of them, and 2 of them watched the door.

Vs 5-6

Now there’s a few things we want to take notice of here, #1 we see that vs 5 sets up a contrast for us, Peter is bound in prison, *but* prayer is loosed by the church. It’s as though we have the political power of Herod, the soldiers, and the prison in one corner, and in the other corner is the power of prayer, no contest really, because the power of prayer has no earthly rival. But there’s 2 things about this prayer that we want to draw attention to and they are #1 The prayer was constant, #2 the prayer was to God.

#1 The prayer was constant, now why exactly the translators chose this word to express the meaning I’m not sure, because the word here really doesn’t speak of a *consistency* though I’m certain that was the case, but rather the word speaks of an *intensity* or a *fergency*. Or to understand it another way, they prayed *earnestly*, with a *fervent intensity*, in other words still, they placed *their heart* into it.

This word is really a medical term that Luke uses describing the stretching of a muscle to its limits, they were giving it all they had. It's the same word Luke uses to describe the way the Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane when it says that being in agony, "He prayer more earnestly" with His whole heart.

You ever wonder why it so often seems today that prayer lacks power? I suggest to you that one reason that it can at times seem that way is because although we want *so much* power, we really (truth be known) are only willing to place *very little* of our heart into it. There's not really an "earnestness" about our prayer life, we bring our grocery list of prayer requests before God (and that's all fine and well) but you see where's your heart really at pertaining to those things? Why would God be compelled through *our* prayers pertaining to matters that *our* heart isn't really concerned with anyway? Now having said that I don't want to leave you with the impression that an earnest heart is able to persuade an otherwise reluctant God. God wants to move, but our earnest heart demonstrates the fact that our heart *really cares* about the matters that are on *His heart*. and When our heart falls in line with the heart of God, when we care about what He cares about, and when we're concerned for that which He's concerned and we petition Him accordingly, then we have the guarantee that His hand will be moved. Jesus put it like this, "*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*" John 15:7

So #1 the prayer was constant, that is earnest, from the heart.#2 We note that they were praying *to God*, another reason that prayer so often lacks power is that we forget Who it is that we're praying to. We become mechanical in our prayer lives rather than consciously coming boldly into the throne room of grace to find help in our time of need. Bringing our requests into the presence of our great and holy God. Someone asked me the other day about Jesus' warning regarding vain repetitions, and I told him that the warning wasn't really in the word "repetitions" its in the word "vain." Jesus was saying don't get into the habit of saying something to the point that it becomes meaningless mechanically repeated phrases, and I think one of the things that can help with that is to remember Who it is that we're praying to, Our Father, in Heaven, Holy is His name, He's worthy of all that we are and much, much more. So they were praying earnestly, and they were conscious of the fact that they were bringing their petitions to God, the prison doors were locked, the gates were shut, but the air waves were wide open, and you know what, they always are. When your hands are tied (even literally in this case) in every other way, you can *always* pray. Take advantage of the fact that the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers. I love the picture in vs 6, if it were the night before your scheduled execution, do you honestly think you'd be sleeping real peaceably? But Peter never seemed to have trouble falling asleep.

He slept on the Mt of transfiguration, He slept in the Garden when the Lord asked him to pray, here we find him sleeping between 2 soldiers on the night of his planned execution. Maybe he suffered from narcolepsy... and he'd just randomly fall asleep at the most inopportune times ;0). But what's the picture we see here? Prayer in vs 5, peace in vs 6, you know where I'm going with this Phil 4:6-7, "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*" "I don't understand it, for all intents and purposes should be inundated with anxiety over it, but I've committed this situation into God's hands and He's just given me peace."

Of course Peter had one other thing going for him, Jesus had told him that he'd live to be old, remember that? Jesus said to Peter, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish*" John 21:18 So between the promise of God's Word, and the power of prayer, Peter experienced peace. The bible says, "*You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.*" Isa 26:3 and Again, "*I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.*" Ps 4:8

Vs7-11

Of course here we're reminded of Heb 1:14 which says of the angels, "*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*" Couple of things to consider here briefly 1st of all there was a small myriad of miraculous things going on here, but of the things Peter was able to do, God expected him to do them. The angel didn't cause Peter's shoes to be miraculously upon him, he said, "Get dressed, put on your shoes and lets go." and I'd almost guarantee you that every time Peter put on his shoes from this night forward he'd be reminded of the work that God did in his life and God's ability to deliver in an otherwise impossible situation. You've heard it before, "Man's impossibilities become God's opportunities." and Once he was safely outside, the angel disappeared, God has given us common sense and He expects us to use it, so that if you're with out a job. Sure God could miraculously grant you one, but if He's given you the ability to fill out an application, and make a few phone calls, He expects you to do it. and Then when you have a job praise God for His mercy in providing you one, but we have a picture here of the supernatural and the natural working very closely together.

But then we also have the question, why did God deliver Peter, and not James? I don't know, apparently God was finished with James, and He wasn't finished with Peter. and That's the principle developed here, that until God is finished with you, He's keeping His eye upon you and will be there to deliver you. Now it might come at what seems like the last minute, Peter was scheduled for execution in a few hours, but God delivered him nonetheless. But when God is finished with you, its time to come home, James was by no means the less fortunate here, he just went to be with the Lord, but the sovereign purposes of God weren't finished yet with Peter.

Vs12-17

Just like that he slides into obscurity, he goes underground and we don't see him much anymore, we know he was in Antioch at one point, perhaps Corinth, we'll see him in ch 15 at the council in Jerusalem and write his 2 epistles later, but that's about all we have with regard to Peter's record from this point forward.

Vs 12 introduces us to John Mark, who would author the gospel of Mark, he was sort of Peter's "Timothy." and Then we have this comical scene really that gives us a glimpse into the humanity of the early church, they were a lot like us. Peter's looking for sanctuary, he goes to the place where he knew they'd be praying, he begins to knock on the door, time is of the essence. This young girl comes to the door, asks who it is, Peter says, "It's me."

She's so excited she just freaks out and runs in to tell everyone Peter is there, and just leaves him standing outside! But then, even more like us, here they are praying away, asking God to strengthen Peter, to save Peter, to defend him, to deliver him, "Peter's here!" "You're out of your mind!" It's like God answers their prayers, and they can't believe it. But isn't this just like us so often? We're praying to God, asking Him for a miracle, God in His faithfulness comes through and we just can't believe it. It encourages me to see these guys have that same tendency, they rebuked her twice, 1st they said she was crazy, then they said, "Well, it must be his angel." Obviously they believed in guardian angels, and perhaps that they even bore resemblance to the one to whom they were assigned. But I love the fact, that even so small a faith, when placed into an all-powerful God can accomplish incredible things. Their prayer was earnest, but their faith wasn't overwhelming, I'm glad God knows that we're but dust. Like the father of the young son that came to Jesus asking for His help and Jesus said, "*If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.*" *Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!'*" and Jesus did the work, He honored where this guy was at and He does the same with you and with me. Peter said, "Go tell James (the Lord's bro, not John's bro) and the other brothers what's happened." and Then he goes underground.

Vs18-19

Their protocol was that if you were guarding a prisoner and the prisoner escaped, whatever sentence they were going get, you got, in this case, death.

Vs20-25

Kind of poetic justice isn't it? Peter delivered, Herod destroyed. The bible says, "*The righteous is delivered from trouble, And it comes to the wicked instead.*" Prov 11:8 Josephus the secular historian records that Herod came into the theatre to give his oration in a robe woven of silver thread, and when the light would hit it, it reflected off the robe like you might imagine the sun reflecting off of glass or some other shiny surface. and The people (seeking to flatter him) began to cry out that he was a god, but that a violent pain arose in his bowels and he had to be removed from the theatre and with in 5 days he was dead. I read somewhere while I was studying this that there's a medical condition whereby these round worms can infest your intestines and they grow some 10-16" in length and they block the intestinal path (for lack of a better way to say it) and it's obviously incredibly painful, you vomit the worms and all kinds of nasty things and if not treated you die, which sounds like what happened with Herod.

At the beginning of this ch it seemed as though Herod was on the throne, and the church was losing the battle, but by the end of the ch it becomes apparent that God is on the throne, Herod is dead and the church is growing and the word of God is multiplying, God sees our problems, He hears our prayers, and He is able to deliver you in your time of need and deal with our opponents. So pray about everything, don't worry about anything, and be kept in perfect peace as you keep your mind stayed on Him, because you trust in Him.

Perhaps you haven't come to trust in Him yet, you don't have peace in your life, because you haven't given your heart to Christ. Listen, God has loved you with an everlasting love, and today if you're willing to receive that Love and repent of your sin asking Jesus Christ to come in to your heart and into your life, then why not do that now, open your heart to Christ and ask Him in.

Prayer points: Help us to walk with the understanding of the fact that You are in control, that we can have peace in You, as we simply *trust* in You. Help us to realize the power of prayer, to be an intercessory people of prayer, help our unbelief and use us for Your glory.