

"When the answer to prayer knocks on the door."

Acts 12

Introduction: Last week in our study of Acts we watched as Peter was sleeping between to prison guards and chained with two chains and it was then that the angel sent from God woke him.

Notice Acts 12:6-7

Peter has come so far in his faith here. Not long ago he was denying the Lord while warming himself by the fires of the world.

John 18:17-18

¹⁷ Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not.

¹⁸ And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.

Peter had grown cold back then but he is not cold now. He is Spirit filled and he has faith and his faith shows in his ability to sleep while awaiting his execution. He reminds me of David in Psalm 3.

Psalm 3:1-8

Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me.

² Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.

³ But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

⁴ I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.

⁵ I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.

⁶ I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about.

⁷ Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.

⁸ Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.

"The Power of Prayer"

Notice Acts 12:8-10

There are three points here in these verses that we need to see.

1. God set Peter free but Peter still had a responsibility of doing his part.

When God moves in our lives, we too have a responsibility to do what we can do. If God opens the door for someone to get a job, they then have the responsibility to get up every day, drive to work and do the very best that they can. God will do what we cannot do but what we can do for ourselves is our responsibility. When God told Noah the flood was coming, it was Noah's responsibility to cut the lumber and to build the ark. God did what Noah could not do and that was He brought the animals two by two. But Noah had to build the ark. God would work in the heart of Artaxerxes to allow Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem but it was Nehemiah's responsibility to motivate the people and build the wall. When the Lord fed the 5000, He multiplied the fish and the bread but the disciples had to distribute the food.

2. The people praying did realize what was happening in the prison.

I point this out because there are many times when we grow weary of praying. But looking at this passage we can see that there are times when God is working and we are not aware. It is critical that we do not give up and stop praying. Let us notice something in Genesis which is a conversation between the Lord and Abraham when it was announced that Sodom was to be destroyed.

Genesis 18:24-32

²⁴ *Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?*

²⁵ *That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*

²⁶ *And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.*

²⁷ *And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD, which am but dust and ashes:*

²⁸ Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it.

²⁹ And he spake unto him yet again, and said, **Peradventure there shall be forty found there.** And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake.

³⁰ And he said unto him, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak: **Peradventure there shall thirty be found there.** And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.

³¹ And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD: **Peradventure there shall be twenty found there.** And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake.

³² And he said, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: **Peradventure ten shall be found there.** And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

Reading this text should make us wonder what would have happened if Abraham had continued to pray. What if he had asked the Lord to withhold judgment for one righteous person, because we know there was one? Possibly Abraham stopped too soon. I wonder how many times we have stopped short with our prayers? Getting back to our text, the church was praying and they had no idea that in the prison their prayers were being answered.

3. The enemies desire toward all believers.

The third point that I want to notice here is what the enemy desires to do to every follower of Jesus Christ. It is his desire to get us "chained" to something and then destroy us and our reputation. Peter was in chains because he was walking ion the will of God and he was a threat to Satan. Each of us are a threat to Satan and he would love nothing more than to get us in "chains" to keep us from what God has for us to do.

What are the "chains" he uses?

➤ Sin.

Many believers have stepped away from the path that follows the will of God and they have become involved in sin to the point that they are "chained" and Satan is devouring their testimony.

➤ Fear

There are many believers today that are "chained" with fear. These chains are keeping some from leaving their homes. Others are chained with the fear of failure so they will not exercise their gifts. Still others are chained with the fear of rejection and they too are

not serving. I know of believers who are chained by the world in the sense that they have a desire to live for what the world has to offer and they all chained up with activities.

2 Timothy 2:3-4

³ *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

⁴ *No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

If you have a loved one or friend who is "chained" let us learn from this passage that prayer works. Don't stop praying. Continue to lift them up daily because you have no idea how God will work to get them free of the chains.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

¹⁷ *Pray without ceasing.*

Notice Acts 12:11

When Peter realized he was not dreaming I am sure he was overjoyed. He had been delivered from Herod and the people. The "expectation of the people of the Jews" was the expectation of killing Peter. The Jews hated him just as they did his Lord.

Application:

Sometimes we are surprised when people of the world rise against us but this is to be expected and Jesus even foretold what to expect.

John 15:18-21

¹⁸ *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*

¹⁹ *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

²⁰ *Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.*

²¹ *But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.*

Notice Acts 12:12-16

Peter knows where the others would be. Mary, the mother of John Mark, apparently owned a large house where they could gather to pray. When Peter knocked on the door and Rhoda heard his voice she was surprised and when the rest knew it was Peter they too were surprised. These verses help us to know that they were not expecting Peter. They were more likely expecting Herod's guards to come and arrest them and put them in prison. If Rhoda had announced that a messenger came and told her Peter was dead, they would have believed her. But they doubted her words, that Peter was at the door.

Application:

These disciples were praying but they were not overflowing with faith. They definitely believed in prayer but like us at times they lacked faith that God would turn this situation around or at least turn it around in this way. Faith is required for our prayers to be answered.

James 5:14-15

¹⁴ *Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:*

¹⁵ *And the **prayer of faith** shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.*

Those gathered in Mary's house certainly had some faith or they would not have been praying. But they were totally surprised when the answer knocked on the front door.

Let us also know that faith in what we are praying for does not guarantee that our prayers will be answered. Our prayers must be in the will of God.

1 John 5:14-15

¹⁴ *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:*

¹⁵ *And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*

I point this out because there are some who will teach you that if your prayers are not answered it is because you do not have enough faith. To that I would say, the prayers in Acts 12 were answered with very little faith and probably the prayers that are not answered is because they are not God's will. Or possibly it is not God's timing.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

Notice Acts 12:16-17

Peter told them what happened and then he departed. He was a fugitive at this point and so he most likely went to a safe hiding place. James died for his faith and Peter was set free because God had a different plan for each man.

Conclusion/Application:

God has a plan for each of us also. Some go through far greater trials than others do. Some have much more of this world's goods while others seem to struggle all their lives. So how are we to respond to this Truth?

1. Accept what God has for us.

1 Peter 5:6-10

⁶ *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:*

⁷ *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*

⁸ *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*

⁹ *Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*

¹⁰ *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

Our God is the God of all grace. The supply of God's grace is never depleted. His grace will sustain us in whatever we are called to go through.

2. Make our time on this journey count.

Psalm 90:12, 17

¹² *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

¹⁷ *And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*