

“The Power Of A Prayer Meeting”
Acts 12:1-24

Introduction:

1. Let's Go Back To Our:
 - ***Journey Through Acts*** Tonight:
 - By Turning To Acts 12 - Where We Begin:
 - Once Again - In A Rather Familiar Place:
 - For The Early Church!
 - **Jerusalem!**
 - But Even Though This City:
 - Has Played Such A Prominent Role:
 - So Far In Acts - It Will Become Less & Less So As The Gospel Continues To Spread - “Unto The Uttermost Part Of The Earth!”
2. But - Back At Jerusalem:
 - The First 5 Verses Of This Chapter:
 - Remind Us Of The Ongoing Threat:
 - Posed To Those Early Christians:
 - In The Form Of Persecution!
 - And So - Beginning In 12:1:
 - We Read - “Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church!”
 - This Herod Is Known In History As:
 - Herod Agrippa - Who Became The Very Last To Bear The Title “King Of The Jews!”
 - He Was The Grandson Of Herod The Great, Who Was The One Who Sought To Kill Jesus After He Was Born!
 - But ***This*** Herod Had The Same Spirit:
 - As His Grandfather:
 - And Sought To Stamp Out The Christians Just As Herod The Great Tried To Stamp Out Christ!
 - And - At First - It Seemed Like:
 - He Would Be Successful In His Effort!
 - Because:
 - In 12:2 - “And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. / And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) / 4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people!”
 - This Herod Was Responsible For:
 - The First Martyrdom Of One Of The Apostles' Of Christ:
 - James - Who Was The Brother Of John - Who Were Both Surnamed, According To The Gospels, “Boanerges” – Or – “The Sons Of Thunder!”
 - James & John Were The Ones:
 - Who Asked Jesus - When They Were On The Way To Jerusalem - In Mark 10:37 - “Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory!”
 - But - Remember How Jesus Answered? “Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized!”
 - And So - The Apostle James:
 - Was The First Apostle To Drink The Cup Of Death:
 - In His Service For Christ!
 - And The ***Church Of St. James*** In The Armenian Quarter Of Jerusalem Marks The Traditional Site Of His Execution!
 - 3. But - Before We Move On:
 - We Can Notice:
 - A Certain Pattern Taking Shape:
 - In The Early Life Of The Church!
 - A Pattern That Has, More Or Less, Continued On To This Day!
 - The Pattern Begins:
 - With A Spiritual Awakening:
 - In The Hearts Of Sinners:

- Through The Presentation Of The Gospel Of Christ!
 - Souls Are Convicted Of Their Sin:
 - They Respond With Repentance & Faith In Jesus:
 - And After They Are Baptized, They Are Brought Into The Fellowship Of The Church!
 - And Then - They Begin To Grow!
 - As They “Continue Stedfastly In The Apostle’s Doctrine And Fellowship, And In Breaking Of Bread, And In Prayers!” (Acts 2:42)
 - But It Doesn’t Take Too Long:
 - For The World To Notice Of The Difference:
 - In These New Christians:
 - Who Used To Be Like Them - In Their Walk, Their Words, & Even Their Worship!
 - And This Change:
 - Often Becomes A Threat:
 - To Their Own Way Of Thinking & Living:
 - And So - Instead Of Listening To The Claims Of Christ:
 - They Turn On The Christians, And Persecute Them In Any Number Of Ways!
 - This Is What Is Happening In Acts 12!
 - But Then - God Often Uses Persecution:
 - To Continue The Next Phase Of This Church-Wide Pattern:
 - And That Is:
 - The Spreading Of The Gospel!
 - Some Who Face Persecution:
 - As Peter Will Soon Do - Will Flee - And Will Take Christ With Them:
 - To Other Places & To Other People!
 - And Then - God Often Uses Them To Form New Bodies Of Believers!
 - And May Even Give Them A Period Of Rest:
 - For Further Growth & Stability!
 - We’ve Seen This Pattern:
 - A Few Times Already In Acts!
 - A Period Of Awakening - Which Led To:
 - A Period Of Persecution - Which Led To:
 - A Period Of Outreach - Which Led To:
 - A Period Of Rest!
4. But - In This New Wave Of Persecution:
- At The Hand Of Herod Agrippa:
 - How Did The Church Respond?
 - In 12:5 - We Read - “***Peter therefore was kept in prison:*** but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him!”
 - When Peter Was Arrested, And It Seemed Like He Was About To Meet The Same End As James:
 - The Church Responded By Having A Prayer Meeting!
 - And It Was Through That Prayer Meeting:
 - That God Brought That Persecuted Church In Jerusalem:
 - As Well As Peter Himself:
 - Out Of That Moment Of Danger & Crisis!

5. And So - Tonight:

 - I Want Us To Focus Our Attention:
 - On - “The Power Of A Prayer Meeting!”
 - Not Just Theirs - Back Then:
 - But Even Ours - Today!
 - I Believe That There Is Still Power In Prayer Meetings:
 - As We Meet Together As God’s People - To Intercede On Behalf Of Others!
 - And - As We Just Read - We First Discover:

1. ***The Reasons For A Prayer Meeting!***

- In 12:1-4 - As Herod Sought To “Vex Certain Of The Church!”
 - He Set His Sights On The Leaders Of The Church!

- First On The Apostle James:
 - Who, It Seems, Was Somewhat Suddenly & Unexpectedly Seized:
 - And Then Killed - “With The Sword” - Which Means That He Was Probably Beheaded Like John The Baptist!
 - This Shows That Herod, For Some Reason, Had:
 - A Personal Animosity:
 - Against Christ And His Church!
 - Or At Least Against The Fervent & Fearless Preaching Of That Old “Son Of Thunder” - James!
 - But - When - According To 12:3 - “He Saw That It Pleased The Jews!”
 - He Then Set His Sights On:
 - The Next Most Prominent Leader - Peter!
 - And This Shows That He Also Had A Desire For:
 - A Public Appeasement!
 - He Was Willing To Do Whatever He Could:
 - To Curry Favor With The Jewish People:
 - Even If It Meant Killing Other Jews:
 - Whose Only Crime Was Believing That Jesus Was Their Long-Awaited Messiah!
 - Both Of These Continue To Appear As:
 - Reasons For The Persecution Of The Church:
 - And They Both Remain:
 - Reasons For Prayer!
 - But - Look At When This Prayer Meeting:
 - Took Place!
 - Look At 12:6 - “And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison!”
 - Peter Had Already Been In Prison For A Few Days:
 - And Was Being Strictly Guarded By:
 - “Four Quaternions Of Soldiers!” - This Meant - That At Night - Every Three Hours, A New Squad Of 4 Soldiers Would Rotate To Guard Peter! Two - Would Be Chained To Peter In The Prison Cell - And The Other Two Would Guard The Gates Of The Prison! Seems To Be A Bit Over-Kill!
 - But On The Night Before:
 - Peter Was To Be “Brought Forth” For His Trial:
 - And Likely Execution:
 - The Church Was Praying!
 - Even Though The Timing:
 - Was Urgent - And The Chance:
 - Seemed Slim & Even Impossible:
 - Still - 12:5 - “Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him!”
 - We Need To Remember That:
 - We Always Have A Reason:
 - For A Prayer Meeting!
 - In The Worst Of Times!
 - But Even In The Best Of Times!
 - Prayer Is What Has Always Gotten:
 - The Church Through These Times!
 - It Still Can & It Still Will!
 - Because - There Is Power:
 - In A Prayer Meeting! Especially When You Consider:

2. ***The Response Of A Prayer Meeting!***

- What Was This Prayer Meeting Like:
 - There In Jerusalem?
 - First - We Learn That There Was:
- Continuous Prayer:

- At This Prayer Meeting!
 - Again - 12:5 - “Without Ceasing!”
 - It Doesn’t Say That There Was Singing! We Are Not Told If There Was A Message! The Primary Purpose Of That Meeting Was Prayer!
 - And They Continued To Pray!
 - And They Did So Fervently! It Wasn’t Just A “One & Done” Prayer Meeting! They Persisted! Praying With Passion From Their Hearts & With Tears In Their Eyes!
 - And It Was Also:
- Concerted Prayer!
 - The Prayer Meeting Had One Main Purpose:
 - 12:5 - They Prayed - “For Him!”
 - The Prayed For Peter!
 - What Were The Specific Requests? We’re Not Told!
 - But I Imagine Our Requests Would Have Been:
 - Similar! Prayer For:
 - His Release & Rescue!
 - His Peace & Rest!
 - His Opportunities Even In Prison!
 - We’ve Prayed The Same For Others!
 - But The Prayers Were A Concerted Effort:
 - For God To Intervene In The Life:
 - Of Peter & The Church!
 - It Was Also:
- Coordinated Prayer!
 - In 12:5 - We Are Told That It Was A Prayer Meeting:
 - “Of The Church!”
 - And Then - Later In 12:12 - It Says That - “Many Were Gathered Together Praying!”
 - There Might Have Been Other Prayer Meetings:
 - In Other Homes All Throughout Jerusalem:
 - But We Are Only Told About This One!
 - But At This One - “Many Were Gathered Together!”
 - Why Did They All Come?
 - Not Just Because:
 - They Loved Peter!
 - But Because They Believed In:
 - The Value & The Power Of Prayer!
- These Are The Kinds Of Prayer Meetings:
 - We Still Need As A Church!
 - We Need Prayer Meetings That Are Devoted:
 - Just To Prayer!
 - How Many Times Do We Meet For Prayer And Don’t Pray?
 - We Need Prayer Meetings That Are Devoted:
 - To A Specific Purpose!
 - Perhaps This Is The Kind Of Prayer Meeting We Are Prone To Neglect And Need More Of!
 - We Need Prayer Meetings That Are Devoted:
 - To God’s People! Where “Many [Are] Gathered Together!”
- There Still Is Power In Prayer Meetings!
 - And If We Really Believed This:
 - It Would Be Reflected In The Numbers Who Come To Pray!
 - Especially When We Remember What God Can Do Through Our Prayer Meetings!
 - Like:

3. ***The Rest Through A Prayer Meeting!***

- Not The Rest For Those Who Are Praying!
 - Like Peter & James & John:
 - When They Were With Jesus In The Garden Of Gethsemane!
 - But Rest For The Ones Being Prayed For!

- Because - As The Church Was Meeting In Prayer For Peter - How Do We Find Peter In Prison?
- Again - 12:6 - "The same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains!"
 - Without Them Even Knowing It:
 - God Was Answering Their Prayers For Peter - By Giving Him Rest - Right There In Prison!
- There Was Calmness:
 - In Peter's Mind!
 - There Is Not A Hint Of Worry Or Fear!
 - Not A Tinge Of Doubt About What Happened To His Friend & Brother, James!
 - He Just Kept On Sleeping!
 - Even To The Point - In A Bit:
 - Where An Angel Had To Hit Him In His Side:
 - Just To Wake Him Up! He Was Sleeping Soundly & Calmly! Also:
- There Was Confidence:
 - In Peter's Heart!
 - Even Though His Own Death Seemed Imminent:
 - He Probably Remembered What Jesus Said Back In Luke 12:4 - "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do!"
- God Was Answering The Church's Prayer:
 - Even *While* They Were Praying!
 - And He Still Does This Today!
 - You Never Know The Rest That God Might Provide:
 - To Someone As A Result Of Our Prayer Meetings!
 - But Then - We Need To Also Remember:

4. ***The Results From A Prayer Meeting!***

- Sometimes God Answers:
 - In Very Specific & Surprising Ways!
 - This Is What We Find In The Rest Of Peter's Story!
- 12:7-17 - "And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. / 8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. / 9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. / 10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. / 11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. / 12 And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. / 13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. / 14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. / 15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. / 16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, *they were astonished.* / 17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place!"
 - Remember - God Answers Prayer!
 - Even Though Our Prayer Meetings:
 - May Be Full Of Fear & Uncertainty Or Even Some Doubt!
 - There Is Still Power In A Prayer Meeting!
- Because The Results:
 - Do Not Come From Our Prayers!
 - They Come From Our God!
 - Who Answers Our Prayers!
 - But - How Will You Know:
 - If God Has Answered Your Prayer:

- If You Don't Pray?
- Sometimes - When We Hear About Something Good:
 - That God Has Done - We Might Make The Remark:
 - "What An Answer To Prayer!"
 - But Is It? Really?
 - Was It An Answer To **Your** Prayer?
 - Or Was It An Answer To The Prayer Of Someone Else?
- The More Answers We Seek:
 - The More Prayer Meetings We Need!
 - Because - As James 4:2 Reminds Us - "Ye Have Not Because Ye Ask Not!"
- But We Also See:

5. ***The Relief From A Prayer Meeting!***

- Because God Used This Prayer Meeting:
 - To Bring This New Wave Of Persecution To A Stop:
 - And Provide Another Period Of Relief For His Church!
- 12:18-24 - "Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. / 19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode. / 20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. / 21 ***And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.*** / 22 And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. / 23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. / 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied!"
 - So - Not Only Did God Answer:
 - The Prayers Of His People:
 - To Provide For:
 - The Rescue Of Peter!
 - He Also Provided For:
 - The Rest Of His People!
 - He Removed The Source Of Their Persecution:
 - By Rewarding Herod's Pride:
 - With His Own Death!

Conclusion:

1. All This Was The Result:
 - Of A Prayer Meeting!
 - Now - There Are Still Some Lingering Questions:
 - In This Story - Especially When We Think About:
 - What Happened To James!
 - Did God Fail James?
 - Were There No Prayer Meetings For Him?
 - Why Was He Not Rescued As Peter Was?
2. When It Comes To Questions Like These:
 - It Is Good For Us To Remember That:
 - God's Ways Are Still Higher Than Our Ways, And His Thoughts Than Our Thoughts! (Isaiah 55:9)
 - And So - We Still Need To Trust In The Plan & The Providence Of God:
 - For ***All*** Of His People!
 - Including James!
3. However - God Did Not Fail James!
 - Perhaps It Was The Sudden Seizure & Execution Of James:
 - That God Used To Get His People:
 - To Take Their Prayer Meetings For Peter:
 - More Seriously!
 - And In Truth:
 - God ***Did*** Rescue James!
 - He ***Had*** "Fought A Good Fight" & "Finished His Course" & Had "Kept The Faith!"

- There Is A Tradition Attached To The Death Of James - Recorded By Some Early Church Historians!
 - That His Jailer Was So Moved By His Love For Christ, That He Was Converted Himself, And Offered Himself For Execution Along With James!
- But When James Was Killed - Jesus Himself Rewarded James With:
 - The Martyrs Crown - Which He Promised In Revelation 2:10 - “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!”
- 4. But God Was Not Quite Done With Peter!
 - And God Used The Prayers Of His People:
 - To Bring About Peter’s Deliverance:
 - As Well As His Ongoing Ministry For Christ!
- 5. Now - What Is It That God Will Do:
 - As A Result Of **Our** Prayer Meetings?
 - Especially When We Remember:
 - There **Still Is** Power In A Prayer Meeting!

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