



21 | ACTS 12:1-25

GOD IS GOOD EVEN WHEN LIFE IS BAD

We need to trust that God is good when life is bad.

Outline

1. **GOD IS IN CONTROL EVEN WHEN WE SUFFER (12:1-4)**

King Herod Agrippa I, Persecutor

Herod Agrippa's Background

Herod Agrippa's Evil Deeds

God is in Control of Evil Government

James, the First Apostle Martyred

Peter, Fellow Sufferer

The Soldiers

The Application

God's Power in Suffering is His Sovereignty

God's Promise in Suffering is Discipline

God's Purpose for Suffering is Conformity to Christ

2. **GOD IS IN CONTROL EVEN WHEN IT'S MIDNIGHT (12:5-11)**

Midnight is a Good Time to Pray

Midnight is a Good Time to Trust

Midnight is a Good Time to Watch

Midnight is a Good Time to Wonder

3. **GOD IS IN CONTROL WHEN OUR FAITH IS WEAK (12:12-19)**

The Fact of Weak Faith

The Fear of Weak Faith

The Feebleness of Faith

The Focus of our Faith

The Forward Movement of our Faith

4. **GOD IS IN CONTROL EVEN WHEN THE WICKED PROSPER (12:18-25)**

The Wicked's Power

The Wicked's Peace

The Wicked's Praise

The Wicked's Punishment

The Word of God Prospers

The Witness of God Prospers

Call to Worship

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, ³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah.* —Psalm 46:1-3

Songs

All Creatures of Our God and King

Goodness of God

Lord I Need You

Not in Me

In Christ Alone

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

GIVING: You can give over Zelle through your bank with no fees (use secretary@livinghopechurch.net). We also have a collection box on the Welcome Center. Malachi 3, “Test me in this” Proverbs: “**Give of your firstfruits.**” We believe blessing comes by putting God first.

NEW SERIES: Next week we will begin a new series in the life of David from First and Second Samuel.

ELDER TEAM CHANGES: We are making some changes on our elder team. Mike Klikas is transitioning out. Due to some health struggles with some of his family, and due to some of the limitations of our facilities, they will be transitioning to another ministry. Also, we have two elder candidates that are going through the process of examination and ordination. Please pray for these two men: Joe Nowosielski and Emilio Huante.

YOUTH CHANGES: It is September, and that means that those now in sixth grade can begin attending youth group. Youth group ends at the twelfth grade. We are also starting a Middle School class on Wednesday nights for 4-6th grades.

YOUTH SERVICE ACTIVITY: We are inviting youth, children and families to join us for a youth service activity at the home of one of our widows, Diana Ehorn on Sept 18 at 10am till noon. We are going to do some cleanup around the yard and if we have enough people and a truck, we’d like to move the large swing set from her yard to the church.

PROLIFE MINISTRY: The murder mill in Wood Dale shut down!

NEW MEMBERS CLASS: Good class yesterday. We do have a link if you want to view it online.

LYDIA’S BOOK: \$10 to sign up.

FATHER/SON CAMPOUT: Mark your calendars for our Father-Son Campout on September 10-11. It will be held at Waterfall Glen in Lemont. Campers must arrive before 7pm, when they close the gate to the campground. Bring your camping gear, food, drinks, and some good shoes for a nice hike! More info to come.

LIFE GROUPS: Life Groups are beginning back up in September! Groups will meet on September 15 & 29. Please get with your group leader for more details on location and time. If you need a Life Group, please see one of the pastors and we will get you plugged in.

NURSERY MINISTRY: The nursery is currently being restructured. We are looking for ladies 18 and older who are willing to work on a monthly rotation to assist with the classroom activities. If you are interested in assisting, please talk with Emily Tiberi.

BABY SHOWER: All ladies are invited to a baby shower honoring Emily Cerrillos on Sunday, October 10th at 1:00 pm. Emily is registered at Amazon and Target. Also, please bring a dish to share.

MEN'S RETREAT: October 1-2, Fri-Sat, Cost is \$82.50. Next week is last time to sign up.

Introduction

We continue our series in the book of Acts called "Life on Life Discipleship." Our title this morning is: "God is Good Even When Life is Bad".

God is in control. Do you believe that? It doesn't matter what happens to you. It doesn't matter the pain and suffering you experience. You must never think that God has fallen asleep or that he's uninterested. He is in control, and he is good. He is directing all events in your life for your good and his glory. Now some of you are suffering incredibly. But it is our suffering that humbles all of us so that we can know God. Here's what I want us to understand. If we truly understood the goodness of God, that he is love, and that his love is fixed on doing good to unworthy people like us, it would transform us.

God is supremely good. And he is in control of all things. He's in control even when you can't see it or understand it. The theological concept is the God is sovereign. Many understand the theological term, but don't have **the reality of God's peace** in their life. When you know that God is good and that he's in control, directing all things for your good, then you can truly have peace. Do you have peace in your heart? So here is the key truth: God is good even when life is bad.

Let me put it another way: there is nothing that happens to me that can ultimately hurt me if I am in Christ. He will use it for his glory and for my good, to conform me to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29). He will ultimately prove to me that he is wise and righteous for bringing that event into my life. This is what it means for God to be in control.

Now there is something in your life that has shaken you. And you were trusting God, trusting God, trusting God, and then it happened. And something shook you so bad, that you said, "I was on your program God until this happened. This is too hard. **How can you use this for good?**"

When life changing tragedies occur in your life, you have one of two choices: **trust God or doubt God.**

My mother died when I was 15 years old, just three months after I came to know Christ. She was only 49 years old. At that moment I put my full trust in God for that tragedy. I told my twin sister at the time, "I don't know what God is doing, but I know he is good, and I will follow him wherever he leads me." But had I doubted the next years of my life, instead of being the best years (which they were) would have been the worst years. What if instead of giving myself to prayer and to the arms of my good heavenly Father, I would have given myself to drugs and drink and sinful living? Where would my life be today? So let me say it again:

God is good all the time. And all the time God is good!

I want us to trust God today.

Key Thought: We need to trust that God is good when life is bad.

There are four situations we can see the goodness of God.¹

1. GOD IS IN CONTROL EVEN WHEN WE SUFFER (12:1-4)

First, we need to remember that God is good and is guiding our lives even when we suffer unjustly. Wherever there is violence or abuse, we are prone to say, “Where is God in this situation?” “How can God just stand by and let this happen?”

Sometimes God allows hateful people or circumstances into our lives to bring us suffering. God controls kings and nations and events. God sometimes allows bad things to happen to his people.

KING HEROD AGRIPPA I, PERSECUTOR

We find a very bad man inflicting violence on the church in verse 1. God is in control even when I’m suffering under wicked government rulers. Look at this wicked ruler. His name is Herod.

Herod Agrippa’s Background

Acts 12:1 | About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

Who is Herod? This is Herod Agrippa. The name Herod means “hero.” It’s kind of a surname for four brothers who were all rulers in Israel during the early church. Their grandfather is “Herod the Great”. Herod the Great was like the Donald Trump when it came to the architecture of the ancient world, but on steroids. He owned everything and was one of the greatest builders in the ancient world.

Herod the Great’s four grandsons had something in common with the grandfather. They were all tyrants. We find out that Herod Agrippa wants to make the Jews happy, and what makes them happy is to kill Christians. Herod Agrippa had control over Jerusalem and the surround area, and he was happy to oblige.

Herod Agrippa’s Evil Deeds

Acts 12:1 | About that time Herod [Agrippa I] the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

King Herod Agrippa targets believers and rips them away from their churches and families. He “laid violent hands on them”. That means he made a public display of some of them. He likely had soldiers enter their meeting place and **beat them violently**. That’s going on today in places around the world. North Korea, Afghanistan. In a one year period there were 791 deaths that happened in Nigeria alone. So this is not just book of Acts stuff. It’s happening now even more than back then.

¹ The outline for this message is taken from Walk in the Word ministries.

God is in Control of Evil Government

There are many people who say, “We need to get back to the early church. I wish we could live in the days of the early church.” Have you read the book of Acts? Yet and still God is in control of evil government rulers. Listen to the words of Daniel.

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. ²¹ He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings. —
Daniel 2:20-21

That was true back then, and it is still true today. It was true when the evil Herod Agrippa was in charge. And it is true today. God is in control, even when we suffer due to evil government policies. Christ will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Think about what was happening in the book of Acts. The people’s families were being ripped apart by persecution. But it gets worse. **Agrippa flat out kills James**, the brother of the Apostle John.

JAMES, THE FIRST APOSTLE MARTYRED

Acts 12:2 | He [Herod Agrippa] killed James the brother of John with the sword.

This is not the “book of James” author. That’s a different guy. This is the James from the “Peter, James, and John inner circle of Jesus.” So this is a major loss for the church. **The Apostle James is the first of the apostles that is martyred.**

Verse 2 says that Herod Agrippa “killed James the brother of John with the sword.” So James, one of the inner three disciples was beheaded. He is the first apostle martyred. Imagine the shock to the church. James is suffering and is put to death. The church is suffering.

Bad things happen to God’s people. **It is God’s will at times that his dear, precious children suffer and even die.** James wasn’t just a Christian. He wasn’t just a chief leader in the church. He wasn’t even just an apostle. **He was in the top three of the apostles.** He is one of the greatest leaders of the early church worldwide! And he was put to death. Perhaps he had a wife and children. **He was dragged in, a sword was taken out, and his head was cut off.** Never again does the book of Acts refer to the apostles as “the twelve”. Now they are only eleven.

Interesting Fact: James is the first of the apostles to die. John, his brother, is the last of the apostles to die.

The point is: God is good even when life is bad. We are going to see how good God is when we suffer. God has a design for our pain. God is in control. God is working out his purposes. When I can see it he’s in control, and when I can’t see it, he’s still in control. When I feel God’s presence, he’s in control, and even when I can’t feel his presence he’s still in control, working out his good purposes for me.

INTRODUCING PETER

Could it get any worse? The church is suffering violent persecution. Families are being ripped apart. The great apostle James is put to death with the sword, and now we see that

Peter wasn't exempt from suffering either. Peter gets arrested. They want to kill Peter now.

Acts 12:3 | And when he [Agrippa] saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread [Passover].

The Jews loved it when they took out James, “number 3” in the church, so now Herod wants to take out “Number 1”. This is the third time in jail for Peter. He was arrested for healing the lame man in Acts 4, and they lectured him, and beat him, and let him and John go. He was in jail again in Acts 5:18, and an angel freed him and the other apostles during the night.

THE SOLDIERS

So now we are introduced to the soldiers, and they are **a helpless group compared to the omnipotent, almighty God**. But they station a very large number of soldiers to guard Peter. I mean Peter might as well be superman. Last time he was imprisoned by Herod (Acts 5), he was released by an angel. **They can definitely stop an angel with 16 soldiers, right?** Let's read about it.

Acts 12:4 | And when he [Herod Agrippa] had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

Why does Agrippa want to bring Peter out to the people? Remember what he did with James? **A public execution by the sword**. And since Peter had already been imprisoned and released by an angel once already, they put 16 soldiers all around him day and night to guard Peter. **A squad is a group of 4 soldiers each, and 4 squads equals 16 soldiers total guarding Peter**. They only had a few soldiers last time (Acts 5), and Peter was released by an angel. So now they had to be incredibly paranoid about this, and they put 16 soldiers on him. How many of you believe that even 1600 soldiers could not stop God? Amen!

Peter is imprisoned with a gang of soldiers, but if you know this story, you know Peter is at peace and goes to sleep. He's not worried. And Peter is later is freed from prison. But **did James get out?** No. How do you explain that? Does God love James less? No. Let me make this point loud and clear.

God never promised you a life of ease, but instead a life of suffering.

God's best for you is not defined by your lack of suffering. It is defined by your **conformity to Jesus Christ**. Are you looking more like Christ? Then God's plan is succeeding.

You must understand that God has perfect control over every detail of every situation. His purposes are not always seen or known. But there is one overarching purpose we can count on. It is that all our suffering will conform us to Christ. Saints, do you want to be conformed to Christ?

THE APPLICATION

What shall we say to these things? How is God in control of our suffering?

God's Power in Suffering is His Sovereignty

God is in control when we are suffering. He is absolutely sovereign. God has never been like, "Oh I can't believe this happened." God is never like that. **God is in complete control.** Even when James is killed, and Peter is arrested. As far as he can see, it looks like Peter is going to die. We know from the book of Mark, that Peter has a wife. Despite all the pressure of being imprisoned, we know that God is in complete control. Peter believed that because later we see him sleeping. He's at peace and at rest even on what should be his last night alive. God is in complete control when I am suffering. That should bring every child of God peace.

God's Promise in Suffering is Discipline

God promises in Hebrews 12 that whoever he loves he bring discipline into their life. If you're not getting discipline in your life, you are not one of God's kids. If you find yourself on easy street, and suffering is not leading you to become more like Christ, you are not one of God's kids. God knows that true happiness comes through holiness. Holiness is conformity to Christ. If your suffering makes you like Christ, your happiness in Christ will far exceed suffering you have in this world. Holiness is so satisfying that if you get a drink of it, you'll be like a man in a desert drinking a cold glass of water. Holiness is what you were made for. It's when you heart and God's heart are united. That's what God is doing through your suffering and pain.

God's Purpose for Suffering is Conformity to Christ

God never promised we'd understand everything in this life, but he did promise he's working out his purposes in your life in your suffering. God's best for you is never defined by your lack of suffering or how good things go in your life. **God's best is defined by your conformity to Jesus Christ** (Rom 8:28-30).

God's Pathway of Suffering is for Every Christian

Let me reiterate that there is no exemption from suffering. We are all going to suffer in the Christian life. Jesus said this life will be filled with tribulation. Remember the words of Jesus.

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. —*John 16:33*

Your faithfulness is not an exemption from suffering. Think about Job. He was such a faithful and righteous man but remember what he said.

He knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold. —*Job 23:10*

If we are to follow Christ, we also ought to expect suffering. God has a wonderful purpose for pain in your life.

C.S. Lewis said that "pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world."²

² C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 83.

Suffering is one of the primary tools in God's toolbox for refining our character to be like Jesus. God uses pain in our lives to awaken us to areas of our life that are not conformed to Christ. He wants you to come forth as gold.

2. GOD IS IN CONTROL EVEN WHEN IT'S MIDNIGHT (12:5-11)

Second, God is good and is in control even when we have to wait. Even when it's midnight, and down to the wire, and there's no time left on the clock, then God is in control. You think there's no time for God to do something, and I'm telling you God can do anything. There's nothing too hard for the Lord. God is not limited to time and space.

Now let's see how the early church is not all that different from us. They had to wait too. We see in verse 5, that God is making the church wait until the very last minute to answer their prayers.

MIDNIGHT IS A GOOD TIME TO PRAY

Notice that when the worst has happened, the church always has recourse with God.

Acts 12:5 | So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

When you think your life couldn't get any worse, when you feel there's no more light at the end of the tunnel, and you have nowhere else to turn, that's always when God shows up. That's why it's a good time to pray.

When the church, God's people are most vulnerable, they are at their best! We surrender our fears to God, and let him answer as he will. When we are completely weak, and we have nowhere to turn, that's when we are at our best. We are going to pray. Bring your greatest and most difficult problems to him. What does he say?

I am the LORD, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me? —*Jeremiah 32:27*

Listen, if you are not a believer in Christ today, God is using your greatest brokenness to bring you to faith in Christ. If you are not a believer, then God is using your situation to grow you. Either way, God is in control even when it's midnight. Midnight is a good time to pray.

MIDNIGHT IS A GOOD TIME TO TRUST

Consider Peter's attitude when he is chained to two of the Roman soldiers.

Acts 12:6a | Now when Herod was about to bring him out [*to execute him*], on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.

So you had fourteen sentries guarding the door, two soldiers chained to Peter, and Peter is sleeping.

How far away is Peter from death? It's not hours. He's minutes away from death. The king has already dropped his scepter and said, "Bring him out". The soldiers' feet are just

beginning to make their way down the hallway. The keys are rattling. **And what is Peter doing? Peter is sleeping!**

Peter is in the most stressful situation humanly imaginable. What was his secret?

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is fixed on you, because he trusts in you. —*Isaiah 26:3*

Why is Peter sleeping? Because he has so much peace. This is his third imprisonment. This is a mature faith. This is more than a dozen years after Pentecost, and for Peter, this is imprisonment number three! The secret to peace is to magnify the Lord as bigger than your circumstances.

O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. —*Psalms 34:3*

God is in control, even when it's midnight. God is the God who dwells outside of time and space because he's bigger than time or space. He never sweats. He never slumbers. He's a thousand percent interested in your situation. Trust him!

The church is praying earnestly (12:5). What does earnest mean? Urgent, sincere prayer. The church has no idea what God is up to!

But **Peter is resting**. It's midnight. If it's up to Herod, Peter's going to die in the morning. But Peter is not afraid of death. Christ has conquered death. Death has no sting for Peter, so he is sleeping. But he's about to get a wakeup call.

MIDNIGHT IS A GOOD TIME TO WATCH

The plot thickens. The saints are praying. Peter is sleeping. The soldiers are marching toward the cell. Where's God? He's up to something. He may not change your circumstance, but he's going to wake you up, just like he did Peter.

Acts 12:7a | And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly."

Sometimes we think angels are feminine creatures with wings of down and soft hair. Listen, angels are warriors! Yahweh is called the Lord of the hosts of the angel armies! So the angel strikes Peter. Peter had to be sleeping hard! He wacked him. **You've heard of getting touched by an angel. What about getting wacked by an angel?!**

Acts 12:7 | And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.

That's God. They didn't take the chains off. They just fell off. That's God. God can do that. Whatever chains you have in your life, God is the chain breaker!

Acts 12:8 | And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."

Peter was totally out of it. He had to be told what to do. "Get dressed! Put your sandals on." He did whatever the angel said. "Get your coat on!" "Come on let's go!" Peter seems to

have really enjoyed his rest. It's almost like Peter was having such a good rest he had trouble following the angel's orders.

Acts 12:9 | And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

Peter has no clue whether this is real life or a dream! But he's about to get real-life delivered from the situation.

Listen, midnight in your life is a good time to watch for God to do something beyond your imagination. Remember God's promises to us. God wants to do so much more than we are asking.

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. —1 Corinthians 2:9

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church. —Ephesians 3:20-21

MIDNIGHT IS A GOOD TIME TO WONDER

When there is nothing we can do, and we are in the midnight of a situation, then this is the time to see God's miracle power.

Acts 12:10a | When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord...

So Peter and the angel are running toward the iron gate leading to the city. It's night. There are watchmen. You can't just get in. But God opens that too. So far two locked gates have opened.

God, at any moment, can open any door for us. God can do anything! Peter was minutes away from execution, and now he's running as fast as he can toward a locked gate, and it supernaturally opens!

Acts 12:10b | And they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him.

So he's running with an angel, and then suddenly, he's all alone.

Acts 12:11 | When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

These are the first words recorded out of Peter's mouth. "I am sure that the Lord sent his angel." The sovereign Lord is in control. Peter had to wait until the last minute, but he got an answer.

God is good even when it is midnight! It's not that God is not able to answer. He wants you to learn to trust him. Peter learned that! "Now I am sure!" "It was the Lord!! Herod couldn't touch me! The blood thirsty Jewish leaders couldn't touch me!"

What are you facing? What is your midnight situation? Remember to pray. Trust the Lord. Watch the Lord work. And wonder at his miracles when he answers.

3. GOD IS IN CONTROL WHEN OUR FAITH IS WEAK (12:12-17)

God is in control even when my faith is weak. The early Christians believed in the power of prayer, but their faith was weak. They prayed earnestly, sincerely, urgently for Peter (12:5), but we find that **the last person they were expecting at their prayer meeting was Peter!**

THE FACT OF WEAK FAITH

Acts 12:12 | When he [*Peter*] realized this [*that he was free*], he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

So who is this Mark? He's a new guy. This is John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark. This is the cousin of Barnabas who twenty years later is going to see first see Peter put to death by Nero, and then Paul. He's going to become Peter and Paul's right-hand man in their golden years.

The saints were at John Mark's house under lock and key because of the awful persecution. This is also likely the house where the disciples met for the Passover in the upper room. The upper room is likely located in the upper part of John Mark's house. I've been to this location. You can see the southern steps of the Temple where Pentecost took place from this room.

Peter's just been released from prison, and he goes to this strategic house. **He joins the prayer meeting where they are already praying for him.** Can you imagine? They are praying for a miracle—something impossible. In fact, **some are probably by this time asking God to help Peter's family in their grief since he's probably dead by now.**

THE FEAR IN WEAK FAITH

These were people that had weak and wavering faith like us. And there was a gateway, so it was a **big house** with a gateway and a courtyard and a fence surrounding it. They were in a secure place.

Acts 12:13a | And when he knocked at the door of the gateway...

Peter's just been released from prison, and he's knocking at the door of this rich house. He was supposed to be put to death the next morning. Do you see the irony? Peter's just been let out of the prison by an angel, but he's locked out of the prayer meeting where they are praying for him! Peter knocks and meets a servant girl.

Acts 12:13b | A servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.

Rhoda, the little servant girl is praying. This tells us that our children should at times be in our prayer services. She hears someone knocking at the gateway in the courtyard. She gets up. The gate is obviously locked, or Peter would have come right in. **Why is the gate locked?** It's clear why the gate was locked. Because **Christians are being killed!** It's against the law to be a Christ follower! They were all scared!

Peter shows up and Rhoda doesn't even let him in!

Acts 12:14 | Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.

Poor Peter. He is left outside the locked gate. **Angels opened gates for him in the prison, but he's locked out of the prayer meeting.**

Have you ever been praying about things, and you halfway don't expect an answer? Now we are supposed to pray in faith. But there are often times when our faith wavers. The early believers struggled in the same way.

THE FEEBLENESS OF FAITH

Rhoda rushes into the believers with Peter standing outside and it says she "reported that Peter was standing at the gate" (12:14). What was their response?

Acts 12:15a | They said to her, "You are out of your mind."

They thought she was certifiably insane! Why were they praying if they didn't think that God could do it? Look at this great faith they had! No their faith was feeble and frail. They had the faith of a mustard seed.

The Christians had such weak faith, they thought Peter was dead and this was either an angel or Peter's ghost.

Acts 12:15b | But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!"

Wouldn't you still go and see if it was an angel?! "Just an angel?!" "We'll pass!" "Only if it's Peter!" The point is, they thought that Peter was *dead*.

THE FOCUS OF OUR FAITH

Acts 12:16a | But Peter continued knocking...

Rhoda's back in the house. And Peter's on the wrong side of a locked door, and it says he "continued knocking" and was locked out of the prayer meeting. Why do you think he kept knocking? He just escaped from prison! You can almost hear the dogs barking in the street, and Peter kept knocking. He's a fugitive! But God wants to bring their faith to a new level.

Look at the weak faith of these Christians. They finally open the gate for him. You see that God is growing their faith.

Acts 12:16b | And when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.

What were they? They were *amazed*! They were astonished! That doesn't sound like expectant faith! But their faith is growing. God looks at us as his dear children. We are weak and feeble, but we are his. You can imagine them shouting and rejoicing and utterly shocked! But Peter quiets them.

Acts 12:17a | But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers."

He's telling them about how he was surrounded by 16 soldiers, sound asleep! He told them "how the Lord had brought him out of the prison." He's verifying the amazing account that Luke later writes. It's all true.

THE FORWARD MOVEMENT OF OUR FAITH

Acts 12:17b | Then he departed and went to another place.

Peter went on to many more adventures of faith. He didn't take time off to recover. He's at ease. He's at rest. I love this example of faith.

Did the early Christians at times have very weak faith? Is God good despite our weak and wavering faith? Can God work even though our faith is small? Absolutely! Be encouraged!

4. GOD'S IN CONTROL WHEN THE WICKED PROSPER (12:18-25)

Now this is the end of the story, and it is a bit surprising. We see that there is a great stir when Peter is not found in the prison. He's disappeared again. He's been "touched by an angel" again. This is becoming common place for Peter. It is here we are introduced to the unmitigated power of a tyrant.

THE WICKED'S POWER

Acts 12:18-19 | Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

Herod Agrippa finds the 16 soldiers and puts them to death. He's so disturbed that he needs a vacation, and he heads to his grandfather's magnificent palace and campus there in Caesarea Maritima by the Mediterranean Sea. It's marvelous collection of architecture. The remains of the buildings are still intact today. I've walked among them myself. The point is, this king looks like he has no accountability. It seems he can do whatever he wants, but we find it's not so.

THE WICKED'S PEACE

Here we have a mirage of peace that King Herod Agrippa seems to enjoy with the people.

Acts 12:20 | Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.

Herod Agrippa was not a good man. He wasn't even a great man like his grandfather. He was really just paying off the population to like him. It's like all the buying of votes with empty promises that politicians make today. And this made Herod Agrippa popular at least with some people.

THE WICKED'S PRAISE

It seems that there are always a contingent of people who will say anything as long as the government is giving them what they want.

Acts 12:21-22 | On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. ²²And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!"

It's dangerous for a fallen human being to be a glory thief and receive the praise that only belongs to the Lord. But they praised Herod, and he thought he could be worshipped without accountability.

THE WICKED'S PUNISHMENT

Acts 12:23 | Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

Can you see that God is in control? He will punish wicked tyrants, if not now, when he returns. Remember that "every knee will bow"!

At the name of Jesus every knee should bow...¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. —*Philippians 2:10-11*

Herod was given the fate of all those who do not know Christ. You see, God is not willing that anyone should perish and go to hell, but that all should come to repentance (1 Pet 3:9). But if you bypass the mercy of God, you will have to pay for your own sins yourself, forever and ever in the lake of fire. Notice Herod Agrippa was "eaten by worms." Why? "Because he did not give God the glory." And let me tell you, the physical destruction of Herod's body by worms was just a foreshadowing of the eternal torment that is coming for anyone who does not know Christ. The Bible says that hell's lake of fire is a place where "the worms [maggots] never die, and the fire is never quenched" (Mk 9:28). You don't want to go there. The torment goes on forever because people there never stop sinning against God. God doesn't want anyone to go there.

Learn from this king who would not turn to God. He perished, but it's not too late for you. Bow your knee. Give God the glory. All those great and small on this earth who insist on living as if God is a low priority, judgment is coming. "Seek first the kingdom of God" (Mt 6:33). Let's give Christ the preeminence and give him all the glory!

God dealt with that wicked king. And what was the result? God's word prospered and spread.

THE WORD OF GOD PROSPERS

Acts 12:24 | But the word of God increased and multiplied.

You see God is in control, even when the wicked prosper. And despite the wicked, the word of God prospers. God will take care of the wicked. There are tyrants in the government, but they cannot overrule God. We have to live with courage and faith and take a stand against tyrants. What that mostly means is that we never stop preaching and giving the hope of Christ. The government of this world can never stop us from evangelizing and discipleship.

THE WITNESS OF GOD PROSPERS

Acts 12:25 | And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

What we find out now is that Barnabas and Saul and John Mark get together and start planning for the first missionary journey that will be launched in the next chapter.

We have to trust that God is in control when the government is trying to control our lives and divide the church. This is a time of great satanic power in our country, but don't be discouraged—God is still on the throne. The gospel will go forth. Tyrants try to disrupt the power of God from building his church but is impossible. God has control over the tyrants. The church will be built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail!

Conclusion

You may be suffering today, and you can't make sense of it. You know God is in control, but you can't see through the shadows and darkness of your circumstances. When you can't see the hand of God, trust his heart. He wants to do the ultimate good for you, which is to rescue you from ultimate death.

Think about life like a **beautiful tapestry**. When you look at the backside, all you see is loose strings and knots and messes. But turn it over and it is a beautiful work of art. That's our life. All the suffering is like the knots that form in us the beautiful heart of Christ. God's making a truly beautiful tapestry out of your life.

If you are without Christ, you are in a greater dilemma than Peter. Peter got out of prison, not because he needed to be rescued from death. Death was already conquered for Peter. He had trusted in Christ. But he needed to be released so he could rescue others from death. There was a lot of missionary work he needed to do, and he would ultimately live another twenty plus years and die preaching the gospel in Rome where he would be crucified. We learn that he didn't feel worthy to die the same way our Lord died, so he asked to be crucified upside down. Was that a defeat for Peter? No! Death is just the beginning for the believer. All who know Christ will live forever with him. Soon Christ will return and renew the earth, and we will live forever here in a renewed earth with a renewed body. Death is defeated. God is in total control, and he is working all things for our good and his glory.