

Refuge City Church — June 12, 2022
Acts: “Why him and not me?” [Acts 12]

Introduction

- **Last time:** Peter recounts the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles at Cornelius’ house [salvation for all], and the church goes on mission [Antioch].
- **Today:** We look at, the sometimes confusing sovereignty of God. We may not understand why God allows the things He does, but by and through His Word, we know it is all according to His will...and that we can trust.

Verses 1-5

“About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he 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. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.”

- The persecution of the Church continues, with new fervency.
- Herod Agrippa I [grandson to Herod the Great, who ruled during the birth years of Jesus], continues the persecution of Christians, “**as it pleased the Jews**”.
- This seemed to be a politically charged persecution. Not so religious as in the past.
 - James, brother of John [sons of Zebedee; “sons of thunder”] killed/martyred for his faith.
 - **Mark 10:37-39**, [James and John approach Jesus] “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized...”
 - **QUOTE:** “In order to share in the crown of glory, we must be willing to share in the suffering of the cross.” [unknown]
 - This is what James ultimately did in and throughout his ministry.
 - Extra-biblical record [Eusebius; c. 260-339 AD] indicates that the soldier who guarded James was so affected by his witness, he declared himself a Christian and was executed alongside James.
 - In like fashion, Peter is arrested and more than likely facing the same fate as James, yet his arrest takes place during Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
 - So Peter is put in prison ‘with certainty’ that he would not escape, like he did the last time [Acts 4:3 (arrested); Acts 5:19 (jailed, but escaped with help of an angel)].
- And the church prayed in earnest! [fervently; intently; without ceasing]

- Did the church not pray for James?? Most likely they did.
- Or, maybe his death happened so quickly, they didn't have time for reactionary prayer.
- Whatever the case may be, when the Spirit prompts, pray!
 - **Ephesians 6:18**, "praying at all times in the Spirit..." — **1 Thessalonians 5:17**, "pray without ceasing."
 - **2 Corinthians 1:11**, "You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many."
- Herod had political power, a prison, multiple guards, chains, and iron bars.
- The church had prayer.

Verses 6-17 [READ]

- God acts in *His* timing, in *His* way, according to *His* will.
 - He sends an angel to rescue Peter from prison.
 - But let's focus on the angels words spoken to Peter.

1. "Get up quickly"

- Same word Jesus used regarding the death of Lazarus [**John 11:23**, "Your brother will rise again."]
- In Christ, as members of His family, there is no death. [**John 3:16**]
 - **John 6:51**, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."
 - **John 8:51**, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."
 - **John 11:25-26**, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"
- Even as Peter was faced with certain death, he was at peace [**verse 6; sleeping**].
 - **Psalms 4:8**, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."
 - **1 Peter 5:7**, "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."
- In times of uncertainty, stress, pain, loss, etc., our deeper hope lies in the certainty of God's will.
 - **2 Corinthians 1:8**, "...For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself."
 - **1 Peter 3:12**, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer..."
- We might think, "Why was James beheaded and Peter saved??"
 - We need to stop focusing on death, and focus on how we are living!

2. "Dress yourself, put on your sandals"

- Don't ignore the little steps of obedience God requires of us.
- These could be steps of preparation, and/or the work of provision.

- When Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, He asked those with Him to “take away the stone” [John 11:39], and when Lazarus walked out, “Unbind him, and let him go.” [John 11:44]
- **Luke 12:25-26**, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?”
- [Parable of the Talents] **Matthew 25:21**, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”
- Be faithful in the little things, and stop worrying about what you can not control.

3. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me”

- In like fashion, Peter not only had to get dressed, but needed to prepare to move fast.
- The angel only took him so far. Peter had to move through the city undetected, and find his way to the house where the others had gathered.
- God can & will provide miraculous salvation, but it doesn’t mean the road is easy.
 - **Psalm 119:105**, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”
 - **Matthew 7:13-14**, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”
 - **Hebrews 12:2**, “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

- Verses 5 & 12: Faith and Prayer

- I believe we all have enough faith to pray when someone needs it.
- Yet we’re continually shocked and lack belief when God answers those prayers!
 - **James 5:16 NLT**, “The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.”
- We need to understand and believe that God hears our prayers.
 - **Acts 10:4**, [the angel’s response to Cornelius] “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.”
 - **Proverbs 15:29**, “The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.”
- We need to then humble ourselves and ask.
 - **Psalm 4:1**, “Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!”
 - **Psalm 86:6-7**, “Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me.”
 - Keep in mind that prayer is not getting your way. Rather it is aligning ourselves to *His* will and way.
 - **Proverbs 21:1**, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”
 - Prayer is dependency, and trusting the answer is exactly as God intended

Verses 18-23

“Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And 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. 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. On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” 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.”

- Herod is judged and dies.
- A life lived in abject hostility towards God will only result in death.
 - James would write, “But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” [James 4:6]
 - Peter would write, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” [1 Peter 5:5]
 - **Proverbs 3:31-35 NLT**, “Don’t envy violent people or copy their ways. Such wicked people are detestable to the Lord, but he offers his friendship to the godly. The Lord curses the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the upright. The Lord mocks the mockers but is gracious to the humble. The wise inherit honor, but fools are put to shame!”

Verses 24-25 [Conclusion]

“But the word of God increased and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.”

- At the *beginning* of the chapter:
 - Herod seemingly in power & control, persecuting Christians.
 - The church was in hiding, with its leaders being beheaded and imprisoned.
- By the *end* of the chapter:
 - Herod is judged, dead and no longer in power or control.
 - The church increased and multiplies!
- In the *middle* of it all, a church dedicated to prayer.
- *Above* it all, a sovereign God in complete control over all circumstances.
 - **Proverbs 21:30 NLT**, “No human wisdom or understanding or plan can stand against the Lord.”
- Let’s continue in that today!
 - He increases. He reigns and rules. His will and way.
 - We decrease. We submit in prayer and obedience. Trusting in His sovereignty.