

The Power of Prayer

August 22, 2010

Turn to **Acts 12**. The early church had been blessed and was doing very well. The Day of Pentecost launched God's church, 3,000 were saved, and they experienced dramatic growth. Multitudes were being saved, **dramatic growth** immediately happens, and **dynamic miracles** transpire. Also, in the church, they have **determined leadership**.

Anytime there is growth, signs and wonders, and the Holy Spirit is beginning to lead the church, the devil shows up. There is a real, live, walking, talking devil. He is not just a figment of someone's imagination. So what we see happening in Acts 12 is that it is a time of **great persecution**.

Acts 12:1: "Now about that time Herod the king." Herod was a wicked, wicked man. His father and grandfather were just as wicked. Just about everyday, I pray that God delivers me from wicked and unreasonable men and women; because, if the devil is going to attack and persecute you, he will use people.

"Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church." In this world right now, we have brothers and sisters who love Jesus and are under persecution. I was told of a dear missionary who is facing being beheaded because he led people to Jesus.

We have been blessed in America. We come to church in freedom. God has protected America, but I want to tell you something. Any country, any government that does not promote righteousness but promotes sin, any government that passes bills that are full of sin, God will no longer protect that country. That's the truth!

God never blesses sin! The Bible says that any country that will exalt righteousness, Jesus says He will bless. We are killing babies by the millions. We are calling evil good and good evil, and God is not pleased.

Herod was a politician, and in Verse 2 begins to do certain things he thinks will please certain groups of people. I wish politicians would do that which is right no matter who thinks it is wrong. In **Verse 2**, he killed James the brother of John. That is all it says. "Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword."

Do you know who James was? James was a part of the inner circle of Jesus. Out of the 12 hand-picked disciples, James was a part of Jesus' inner circle, along with Peter and John. So, if you are the devil and you're going to bring persecution to the church, who are you going to go after? Are you going to go to the bottom of the ladder? No, no.

Let me tell you something about the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The anointing of the Holy Spirit always flows from the head down. If you are a part of the body of Christ, the anointing is coming your way. When the devil attacks, he always starts at the head; and if you're going to use any wisdom at all in this great time of persecution, you will realize that Herod was going to come after Jesus' inner circle.

James was the first apostle to die. His brother John was the last apostle to die. All of Jesus' disciples die as martyrs except one. John died of natural causes. I wonder why that happened. Well, when Jesus was on the cross, He said to John, "Take care of My mother. She is now your mother." The Bible clearly tells us that if we will honor our father and mother, we will have long life.

So, James is gone, and Herod realizes that the people were pleased about what he did, and he was a people-pleaser. I would to God that we were God-pleasers! The church is devastated. James has died, and Herod goes after Peter next.

I can't fathom why great preachers and men of God die young, but there are certain things I just have to put on a shelf. I can't stay there, because if I stay there I won't go forward. Our marching order is not to retreat. Our marching order is to go forward. The church is under attack, but we can't go back and ask why this or that happened.

Verse 3 says, "And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also." In **Verse 4**, Peter is arrested and placed in maximum security. Get the picture. There are 16 soldiers guarding Peter around the clock. He is chained between 2 soldiers, and there were 2 guards at the prison door. Four guards are watching this dangerous

preacher!

The devil didn't want Peter to get out of there. Not only is Peter in maximum security, but he is facing execution, and look at what it says in **Verse 6**. He is asleep! He is chained to soldiers, facing execution. Where did Peter learn to sleep under those conditions? I'll tell you!

He learned it from the Best of the best. He learned it from the Messiah. He learned it from the Master. It could only come from God. We can't do that on our own. We will worry, fret, stay up and be anxious about tomorrow.

One day Peter was on a stormy sea. It looked like his ship was going to go down. He runs to find Jesus, and Jesus is asleep! We are not called to be like the world. We are called to be like Jesus!

I don't know if you know this or not, but this was Peter's last night. Herod was going to bring him out the next day and execute him, but Peter is asleep.

Let me tell you what I have found out in 40 years of pastoring what people do when a crisis comes. They quit! They throw in the towel. They blame it on this person or that person, but I have witnessed enough times that when people become offended, they give up. I'm talking about this weak, anemic church of today!

If you're only following Jesus because everything is going good for you, and because you have money in the bank, if it ever gets tough, we are going to find out where you stand. We have brothers and sisters whose very lives are being threatened because they are not going to denounce Jesus, and they are not going to give up. We give up because our refrigerator broke down. We rebuked the demons, but it didn't start working again. People are looney tunes in the church today!

You had better lock in, because I've got good news for you. When the early church was being attacked and the leaders imprisoned, they made it a great time of prayer. Look at **Verse 5**. "Peter was therefore kept in prison, but **constant** prayer was offered to God for him by the church."

The New International Version says, "**earnest** prayer." The Amplified Version says, "**fervent** prayer." The word "earnest" in the Greek comes from a medical term that means "extending your muscles to their limits."

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Bible says that Christ "fervently prayed." In the spiritual realm, it means "extending yourself to your limit." You're going at something as hard as you know how. That is how Jesus prayed in the Garden. That is how the church was praying for Peter.

Listen, we're not talking about volume. You can be passionate, and passion comes from the heart. It says, "constant (earnest, fervent) prayer was offered." You have to get it out. It wasn't just thought about. It was offered. It was released to God! It was not released to Allah or Buddha. I emphasize that, because you had better be praying to the right God! I'm talking about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the Living God!

Constant, earnest, fervent prayer was offered to God for Peter by the church. When you're under attack, you go to prayer. **Nothing happens in the Kingdom of God unless it is preceded by prayer.** We have the privilege of co-laboring with our God. God lets us co-labor with Him. We're co-partners with Him. He allows us to ask and pray.

God can do anything, but He is limited by what we ask for. If nothing is happening, then you're not asking for anything; but if we will pray, God will answer prayer.

Let's look at how the church prayed. **The church prayed with confidence.** You have to pray with faith. **James 1:6** says, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting." When you begin to doubt, you get moved around by every wind of doctrine, and the church is full of goofy stuff!

The church prayed specifically. They prayed for Peter. Think about this. Why did James die? I don't know for sure, but perhaps James died because the church didn't pray. Maybe they thought the devil couldn't touch James because he was

one of Jesus' inner circle, but he died. Perhaps, maybe, the church didn't pray. Now the second man of Jesus' inner circle has been taken captive, and they may have said, "We have lost one, but we're not going to lose another one!"

Churches today say that preachers are a dime a dozen. They bring one in, throw one out; bring one in, throw one out. My wife has talked to wives of preachers who have been crushed by churches. They have been beaten up and banged on by churches; but this church was **pinpointing their prayers**. They are **definite in their request**.

I see people come to the altar, and it's like they are shopping. The Lord says, "What do you want?" They say, "Oh, I'm just looking." Sometimes people are frightened to ask for something specific. They have been told that God only answers teeny prayers, but your prayers are big prayers, so you feel a little intimidated. Get in there! The Word says, "You have not because you ask not."

Matthew 7:7 tells us that we need to give our prayers a target. "Ask, and it will be given to you; knock (on the door), and it will be opened to you."

The church prayed passionately. **James 5:16** says, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." If your prayer doesn't mean much to you, do you expect it to mean much to God? If your prayer doesn't mean that much to you, do you think God is obligated to answer it?

I wish we had more prayer warriors. There is a purpose for this church. God is telling us to go forward. We're to stop looking into our rear-view mirror. What I'm sensing about forward is fresh fire, but we have to pray it.

When was the last time you really got stirred up in prayer? Does it take cancer? What does it take to get us stirred up enough to pray? We're blessed, church! We've got houses. We've got cars. We've got clothes. What is it going to take to stir us up? Is it going to take all-out persecution? This church **prayed passionately**. They were not going to lose Peter. What would happen if the Maranatha Fellowship had an army that was passionate?

On September 1, 2010, we are going to join churches all over America in 40 days of prayer. It is called, "If My People." We are going to pray for our country, for America, for revival, for a turnaround. We are going to pray until October 10, 2010, specifically every day for our country. The church will be open from 12:00 Noon-1:00 p.m. Monday through Friday beginning September 1 for prayer, because our country is in trouble.

The church prayed persistently. **1 Thessalonians 5:17** tells us to, "Pray without ceasing." The church was constantly crying out for Peter. They were not going to give up.

Church, I can't relate this to you without some of you misinterpreting what I'm saying. It is important for the Holy Spirit to reveal to you how important the men of God are. I know some are going to be skeptical because of all the con men you have seen and heard, but my Bible tells me that men of God who teach the Word of God to you should be held in double honor. Why? Because men of God are few and far between.

When I was a young preacher, I would ask every man of God I got fed from two questions. (1) What books do you read? (2) What men of God have you been under? I began to read the books they recommended, and those books have become a part of me.

Then almost without fail, every preacher they were under was dead; and I said, "Are there not any more? I don't want a dead one. I want to be around a live one!" When my wife and I found Brother Robert Morgan, who has gone on to be with Jesus, my wife and I followed him around almost everywhere he went. He was a man of God. Then one day, he told me that there was a man that walked with God like Elijah, and his name was Rev. Loren Helm. I met him, and we supported him until the day he died.

In the Book of Acts, this church has come to the realization that they could not give up. They had to persistently cry out for Peter. Then **the church prayed corporately**. **Acts 12:5** says that prayer was offered to God for Peter by **the** church. They prayed as an army. They prayed corporately.

In **Verse 12**, it says that “many were gathered together praying.” There weren’t just 2-3 praying. There were many, and **Verse 5** says **they prayed to God**. They prayed for Peter, the prayer was voiced by the church, and their prayer was made to God.

They prayed to the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-capable God. I’m talking about the all-capable God! I’m talking about the God in **Ephesians 3:20** who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in the corporate body called us. Hallelujah! Glory to God!

In **Acts 12:7-15**, God steps on the scene, demonstrates His power, and sends an angel. I believe in angels, but angels can’t save us. They CAN rescue us. **Hebrews 1** tells us that angels are ministering spirits, created by God to take care of the saints who will inherit salvation. So, angels are on this planet to protect God’s church.

Verse 7 says this is an “angel of the Lord.” God answers prayer. He sent an angel to Peter. **Psalm 50:15** says, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall glorify Me.”

The angel of the Lord comes to Peter, and he is sleeping so soundly that the angel had to strike him. “Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up saying, ‘Arise quickly!’ and his chains fell off.”

In **Verse 8**, the angel tells Peter to put on his clothes and his sandals. Peter jumps up, puts on his clothes and his sandals, but he thinks he is dreaming. I’ve had dreams I thought were real. Peter is experiencing reality but thinks it’s a dream.

In **Verse 10**, it tells us that Peter and the angel come to an iron gate “which opened to them of its own accord.” Peter and the angel walk out into the city. They walk one city block, and immediately the angel disappears. The angel is not going to keep doing what you can do on your own.

Look at **Verse 11**. Peter realizes he isn’t dreaming. “And when Peter had come to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent the angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.’” Where does he go when he gets out? He goes to a prayer meeting! He goes to where he knows the saints are meeting.

When he gets to John Mark’s house, there is a crowd inside, and I believe they are all still praying. It’s amazing that God opened the prison door, but when Peter gets to the prayer meeting, he can’t get in. The gate is locked. So he starts knocking on the door. Tell your neighbor that your miracle is knocking on your door!

He is knocking on the door, trying and get inside to tell the church that is praying for his deliverance that he has been set free, but he can’t get in. Then a girl named Rhoda goes to the door but doesn’t open it. She recognizes Peter’s voice and gets so excited that she forgets to unlock and open the door.

She runs to tell the crowd that Peter is at the door, but they think she’s a little crazy. Read **Verse 15**. “But they said to her, ‘You are beside yourself!’” She kept trying to tell them that Peter was at the door, but listen to their theology. They said, “It is his angel.” While all this is going on, Peter keeps knocking.

It doesn’t say how long Peter is out there, but when they finally let him in, **Verse 16** says, “they were astonished.” Then Peter begins to tell them what happened. When Peter is sharing with the crowd, he says something that is disturbing. He says, “Go tell these things to James and to the brethren.” This is just my opinion, but I don’t think Peter knew that James had been killed.

Do you know what happened to the guards that had been guarding Peter? Herod had them executed.

In **Verse 1**, when Herod began to harass the church, this earthly potentate was up against the King of kings. Herod gets a little nervous after this event, because Peter has been loosed. **Verse 19** says that he ran and went to Caesarea, where he had a fortress, and stayed there.

Then the people of Tyre and Sidon come to Herod begging for food. Their people were starving, and Herod begins to speak and the people shout, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"

God sent an angel to set Peter free, and he sent an angel to strike Herod. He was eaten by worms and died. He was eaten from the inside out. I'm sure he didn't die the first day.

Before I close, I want to give you a word that brings this entire message together. "Touch not My anointed and do My prophets no harm." I wonder what Herod would have done differently had he known what would happen to him when he killed James and attacked God's church. When you come up against the King of kings, you are going to lose.

One day, we will all face a Holy God, and He will not ask what our religious tag is. He will ask, "Do you know My Son?" and if your name is not written down in the Lamb's Book of Life, you will face the same punishment Herod faced. You will go to hell, where the worm dieth not.

My God is a prayer-answering God. Peter was delivered. The people were delighted. The potentate was destroyed, and God's power was demonstrated.