

# The Power of Prayer



## Acts 12: 1-25

We are going to be in Acts chapter 12. We are going to walk through the text of Scripture this morning. If you are like me, it's been a hard few weeks to watch the news. Just pulling out your phone, getting news alerts, maybe you have your television on, maybe you listen to a daily news podcast, however you consume your news, it's just been a hard couple of weeks. It started with images of men and women who are clinging to planes trying to get out of Afghanistan, a country that is now ruled by the Taliban. This is a name we haven't really heard in recent years, but now we see the unfolding drama, the unfolding chaos, so we begin to think about Americans who are in Afghanistan that are trying to evacuate, trying to get out. We see our military trying to facilitate that with all of the complications and all of the chaos. Then of course, we have the news of the suicide bombers causing the loss of life of thirteen American service members and the death toll of Afghans – men, women, and children. We have seen horrific things over just the last couple of weeks. And then, we

get other news that a hurricane is coming. We see and hear all of these things and as we read and listen, we just ask this driving question: "What do we do when there is nothing to do?" In a lot of these situations, we can't do anything. Right? We can't go there, we can't try to rescue – it's out of our hands, it's out of our control.

## **What Do We Do?**

So what do you do when there is nothing to do? That is what we want to try to answer this morning. What do we do when there is nothing to do? I am not just talking about on a global scale, not just on the crisis that we see in the news. What do you do in your own life? What do you do in your own situations that are close around you? Maybe it is a personal situation that is just hopeless and helpless – there is just no way out – you have tried to muscle through it, you have gritted your teeth, you have tried to change things, but nothing is changing. Maybe it is that nothing is changing in your family, maybe in your marriage, or maybe it is a friend who is close to you. You know the people involved, and you realize that it's impossible and there is nothing you can do. It is a hopeless situation, and you feel absolutely helpless. In those moments, what do you do when there is nothing to do? What do you do when you can't do anything?

In Acts chapter 12, we are going to see a hopeless, helpless situation. We are going to see a church facing a crisis, a moment, where there is nothing they can do. They are in a situation where there is absolutely nothing they can do. So we are going to ask the question: What did they do when there was nothing to do? And we have a one-word answer – Pray. That is what you do when there is nothing to do. You pray. I know that sounds like a cliché. We say, "Oh, we'll just pray for them," "just pray for me," or "just pray about it," or "all I need is your prayer." That sounds so empty, so hollow, but what we will see in this text is the power of prayer. We are going to see it displayed, we are going to walk through it. We are going to look at it and then either we will believe the Scriptures or we won't, but if we believe the Bible, we have to believe that prayer has power. We have to believe that the things we can see, all the evils we can see, are no match for the things we can't see. Our God who we can't see, His angels who we can't see, can overcome anything that we can see, touch, and feel.

There are forces beyond what we can see, and our prayers can actually change things. Our prayers can actually move things. So what do you do when there is nothing to do? You pray. I want you to know that prayer is not the least you can do; prayer is the most you can do.

So, let's go to Acts chapter 12 and look at these Christians who are in that situation. They are hopeless and there is nothing to do. Verse 5 is going to be our key text, and then we are going to walk through this chapter of Scripture together. Verse 5 says:

**"So Peter was kept in prison but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church."**

This is a very bad place to be because he is waiting for execution. Peter is in an impossible situation with no way for escape, and there is nothing the church can do about it. They can't storm into the prison – they don't have the manpower, they don't have the means – there is nothing they can do. So, what did they do? They pray to God for Peter, and we are going to see that God answers their prayers.

Now, you may have noticed that we skipped a few things when we left off in chapter 11 verse 18 last week. I hope you have read over verses 19-30, but the reason we aren't going to preach those verses this morning is because it's a lot of the same things that has been happening. The church continues to be persecuted and they scatter, and now they are going into Antioch and preaching the gospel to Jews, to Hellenists, and people are coming to faith in Christ. Then Paul and Barnabas go to Antioch to teach these Christians what it means to follow Jesus.

It was noted in verse 26 that it was in Antioch that for the very first time these people are now called Christians. The way they live necessitates the outsiders to ask... *What do we call these people? They just act strange. They act bizarre. Let's just name them Christians...* So we get that title from the behavior of our brothers and sisters who have gone before us. They followed Jesus in such a way that people started calling them things, and one of the things they called them was Christian.

## **Persecution**

Let's dive into chapter 12. What we see in this chapter is both persecution and prayer. So, what do you do when there is nothing to do? You pray. Let's read a little bit of the context as we get to the situation of the church. Verse 1 says, "About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church." So here we have opposition, persecution, and Herod the king (this would have been the grandson of Herod the Great who was around during the time of Jesus and tried to kill Jesus at His birth). The king here is Herod Agrippa the First. He is the ruler of the land and is over the provinces. He is the guy in charge. He decides he is tired of these Christians, tired of the church, so he lays violent hands on the church. This is a bad situation. So you can imagine being a Christian living in these provinces and realizing the government is now out to get you. The government is now turning violent against you and your faith, so you have to be expecting that persecution, imprisonment, and possible death is coming to you and your family if you continue to follow Jesus.

## **The Death of James**

So we see Herod laying violent hands to those who belong to the church because verse 2 says, "He killed James the brother of John with the sword." So not only is he beating people up and dragging them out, he is executing people who belong to the church. He executes James. Now, this would have been James, the disciple of Jesus, the one who is in the inner circle. Now he is an apostle, a builder of the church, and he is proclaiming the gospel. This is not James the brother of Jesus.

Herod realizes James is a leader. He is somebody who people follow and listen to, so maybe if Herod executes him it will show an example to everybody else that this is not the guy they should follow – that they shouldn't follow Jesus because it would end with their death. So Herod kills James. It would have been a public execution. People would have seen this to be a warning to anyone else who decides to continue to follow this guy named Jesus.

## The Arrest of Peter

Notice in verse 2 Herod kills James with a sword, and then it says in verse 3 "...and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he preceded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of unleavened bread." So as Herod kills James, the Jews were pleased because they don't like the church. Right? They have Judaism, they have their laws, they have their ways, and this whole movement of Christ is against their law as they see it, so they don't want the church to grow. They want the church to die, so when the government gets involved in stopping the church, the Jews think... *This is great for us because no more church means that people will now focus on Judaism and the law...* So it pleased the Jews when James is killed. Herod thinks... *Hey this is giving me favor with the people. I can please the majority if I get rid of this minority people...* So, what does he do? He arrests Peter.

Now, just imagine you are Peter. James just got killed and got publicly executed with the sword. Now you are in prison, and you pretty much knows what is about to happen. You know this is the end of your life. You know this is where the game is over. You know what's next. Execution is also next for you.

We know from verse 3 that it was during the days of Unleavened Bread, so it is Passover. They aren't going to kill Peter during Passover. They are going to put him in prison and Herod is going to wait until after Passover so then they can take him out and execute him. Then verse 4 says, "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 is in prison, but he is not just in prison, he has four squadrons of guards. A squadron had four guards, so this would be sixteen guards who are guarding Peter. This is like maximum security – Peter is on death row. Peter is a hardened criminal in the eyes of the government at this moment. In other words, there is no escape here. Peter is in prison and there are sixteen guards guarding him.

Now, Peter is an ex-fisherman. He might have a fishing pole, but that's about it. These soldiers have swords and bayonets, and they can obviously

take care of Peter. One could take care of him, and there are sixteen of them! So Peter is in an impossible situation. He is in prison just waiting out Passover, waiting to be brought out and delivered to the people. This, of course, means death. Herod knows if he kills Peter, the people will be happy, and he will score some political points.

## **Prayers of the Church**

Here is where we come to verse 5 and that impossible situation the church finds Peter in. In other words, at this moment while the church thinks about their leader in prison, they have to be thinking...*there is nothing we can do. There is nothing we can do to get Peter out of prison. There are 16 armed guards!*...And as we see a little later, there are also guards outside of the prison and there is an iron gate. There is no way. If the church has a plan to try to go and rescue Peter, they soon realize they can't. They are just a band of disciples and they are unarmed. They have no authority to go in and have no might or power to rescue Peter from a prison with heavy guards. They are in a situation where there is nothing they can do. So again, we are going to ask that question. What do you do when there is nothing to do?

The church is looking at Peter knowing there is nothing they can do. He is in prison and he is going to die. Look at that word in the middle of verse 5. I love this! "...but..." It's one of those, eerie little 'buts,' where Luke is saying...*Hold on just a second. Peter's in prison, he can't escape, he is about to die, but...*This is a little moment of tension, but hold on. You think it is an impossible situation, but. What is the "but?" What else is happening outside of the prison? Verse 5 says, "...but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church." So there is an impossible situation. Their leader is in prison about to die. They are in a situation where there is nothing they can do. So, what do you do when there is nothing you can do? They all get together, and they pray earnestly. That is what you do when there is nothing to do. You pray earnestly. When you read a headline that you can't control, you can't do anything about it, what do you do? You pray earnestly. When you are in a situation that you can't get out of, what do you do? You pray earnestly. When you know a friend is in a situation that they can't get out of, what do you do? You pray earnestly.

I love how this sentence structure is laid out in verse 5. Notice as you look at it, "Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him..." So these prayers are for Peter. They are directed for Peter. They are on his behalf, but not just made *for* Peter; the prayers were made *to* God. It is on behalf of Peter, but the prayer is directed to God. Impossible situation? What do you do? You talk to a God who can fix impossible situations. You talk to a God to whom nothing is impossible. That is where you go when things are impossible. When you can't do anything, you turn to God who can do something. You pray. You earnestly pray. They prayed for Peter to God. Where did these prayer come from? They came from the church. That is what prayer looks like. That is what you do when there is nothing to do. You pray. Your fervently pray. You seek after God through prayer. So when you find those situations when there is nothing to do, we are a people of prayer, so we pray. We earnestly pray.

Here is the reality. In your life, you are going to find yourself on both sides of this equation. You are going to find yourself being the 'for,' and you are going to find yourself being the 'by.' When you are the 'for,' you are going to be Peter. You are going to be in prison. You are going to be in a situation with your family, or friends, or health, or a complicated situation. Something in your life is going to happen and you are the person who is in prison. You are in the impossible scenario that you can't get out of. You can't will yourself out, you can't work yourself out; you are in a problem that you can't solve. What do you need when you are Peter? You need people who are praying to God for you. That is what you need. When you find yourself like Peter, you need a people that will fill that 'by.' By the church, there are prayers to God. That is what you need when you are in an impossible situation.

What about when you are on the other side of that equation? What about when you know the Peter who is in the impossible circumstance? What about when you know the thing that the person can't get out of, or the situation is just hopeless, it's helpless? What do you do? You become the 'by.' You make prayers by you, to God, for them, for that situation. You earnestly pray. When you have nothing to do, you pray. We are going to see that prayer is not the least thing you can do; prayer is the most thing

you can do. When we pray to our God, what we have to remember is the seen forces, the seen evil, and the seen problems that we can see with our eyes, touch and feel with our hands. Those seen things are no match for the unseen realities. They are no match for our invisible God. They are no match for the angels that we can't see, and we are about to see that these people are going to witness the unseen powers to be overcoming all of the seen powers that they can see.

### **Pray for One Another**

So what do you do when there is nothing to do? You earnestly pray. You either have prayer for you, or you pray for somebody. This is one of the reasons why it is so important in a church like ours to be connected to a smaller group of people. We talk about this – “find your people.” It's one of our sayings at Hardin. We want you to gather right now for corporate worship, but we also want you to connect. We want you to find your people, whether that's a Sunday school or small group. We want you to find that little pocket of community. Why? So they know you and you know them. So that when you become Peter, you can ask them, “Hey pray to God for me, because I'm going through something that I can't handle on my own,” and you have a people that are praying for you. And you also have a people that when they become Peter, they are asking you, “Hey I'm in a situation I can't get out of. Will you pray for me to God?”

See, it is in those close relationships where we find out our need and we get to pray for one another. We really want you to get into a Sunday school or small group. We have a big green wall out in the foyer posted with a list of where all of our Sunday schools meet. You can go to that list and find when they meet, who they are, and what they do. We would love for you to get into a Sunday school group. We would love for you to get connected on Wednesday nights. The primary function of Wednesday nights is Sermon-Driven small groups. We want you to get in a Sermon-Driven small group. One of the reasons is so that you can pray for the people in your group, and they can pray for you. We really believe prayer has power. If you are not connected, we encourage you to get connected. This is like the season of connection for us, so you are going to hear us talking about it a lot. Come on Wednesdays, go to the wall, and find an



easy way to get plugged into a smaller group of people so you can pray for them and they can pray for you.

## **Trust in the Lord**

So here is Peter in this impossible situation. Here is the church and they are earnestly praying. And I want us to just watch what happen because it's pretty astonishing when you involve God in an impossible situation. Verse 6 says, "Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison." This verse is setting up what is about to happen. That very night, Herod is going to bring Peter out to the people. That means executing him with the sword just like he did James. Passover is over, presumably, and now he is about to bring Peter out and execute him to gain favor with the people. What is Peter doing? Is he worried? Is he panicking? Is he sweating? Is he tossing and turning? Luke tells us Peter is sleeping. Why would Luke tell us that Peter is sleeping the night before his execution? Now, I have slept in some pretty bad spots, but this guy is chained to two soldiers in a prison, and the next morning he is going to die. That's Peter. And do you know what he is doing? He is sound asleep. I don't know about you, but if it was the last night of my life and I was chained to two guards, I'm probably not going to sleep very well. How many of you would probably not sleep good, right? I'm going to be honest; I'm going to be up trying to wiggle out, trying to figure out how do I get out of this! Peter is not trying to escape, he is not trying to get out; he is asleep. Luke is trying to clue us in on what is going on in Luke's heart and his mind. He is not panicked. He is settled. He is asleep. He is trusting in the sovereign hand of God. He knows he is in a situation that he can't get out of. There is nothing he can do. What does he do when there is nothing to do? He trusts in God. He is trusting in the Lord. He doesn't know what's going to happen tomorrow, but God does, so he is going to trust in Him and he is going to just go to sleep.

So Peter is getting a good night's rest the night before his execution because he trusts in the Lord, now let's see what the Lord does. Now, you have to picture this. While Peter is asleep in prison, chained to guards, there are sixteen guards around him, two guards at the door with an iron

gate; there is a house down the road and something is happening in the house. What is going on in the house? Earnest prayer for Peter to God. So you have a whole house, a whole church that is just praying. It is an impossible situation, and Peter is trusting the Lord. The church's response to what to do when there is nothing to do is to pray. They earnestly pray.

## **Peter is Rescued**

Now, what does God do? Verse 7 says, "And behold... (Luke is like, *Ahhh! If you are asleep, wake up! You are about to see something*) ...an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and light shone in the cell." Can you imagine that moment? Impossible situation, chained to guards, asleep. The church is praying and they don't even know what to pray because he is in prison and he is going to die. Then, all of the sudden everything changes. An angel shows up and light shines in the darkness. Behold, an angel comes! You can just imagine things are probably going to turn out well now for Peter because now he has an angel by his side. Luke tells the story in the rest of verse 7 through verse 8, "He struck Peter on the side and woke him up saying, 'Get up quickly.' And the chains fell off his hands. 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.' 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."

So Peter is sound asleep; an angel comes and wakes him up. This is obviously pretty early in the morning. Peter is not himself yet. Have you ever tried to wake somebody up when you are trying to go do something? Maybe you have kids and you are going to leave on a trip the next morning and you wake them up, and you say, "Come on, let's go!" and they are just out of it? And you are like, "Come on!" And you have to kind of hit them a little bit, nudge them. The angel is like...*Get up, Peter! You are rescued! Let's go!...Peter sits up...Ok Peter, step one: clothes, step two: shoes. Are you leaving anything? Jacket. Yeah, go back and get that...*The angel is having to instruct Peter because Peter is just out of it. He is been sound asleep, and Peter doesn't think this is real. Peter thinks he is seeing some kind of a vision, some kind of a dream. It is like he is having this out of body experience.

See, in our modern day thinking, we look at stories like this and think Peter probably just imagined this because everybody believed in angels then. That they were all primed to think about angels, so of course, one would show up – but what probably really happened is Peter actually somehow escaped the prison and then attributed it later to angels because he didn't really realize how good of an escape artist he really was.

Peter is not primed to think an angel is going to come rescue him. As it's happening, he doesn't believe it. But this angel does come, and the moment the angel gets there the chains that are around his arms fall off. Now, it's not Peter who is asleep; it's the guards who are asleep. So you have this idea of the angels causing this deep sleep to fall upon the guards. These sixteen guys who are hired to do one thing (keep Peter there) are now asleep, while Peter is doing the one thing that they are not supposed to let happen, which is leave. Peter begins to walk out not knowing exactly what is going on, and the angel is leading him.

I think Luke really wants us to remember this is not a rescue that Peter did himself. Peter didn't all of the sudden get strong enough and bright enough to rescue himself from the situation. Peter is passive here. God is the one who is rescuing him. God is the one who is showing up. God is the one doing the miracle. Peter is simply having it done to him. There is one person who is supposed to get glory in this scenario, and it isn't Peter. Peter was asleep, like a little child that the angel had to drag out. God gets glory for Peter's escape.

So what happens next? Of course, the angel leaves. Verse 10 says, "When they had passed the first and the second guard..." He is passing guards, trained men who die if they let someone go, and Peter is just passing them. I don't know if they are asleep or if they are just letting it happen, but it is actually happening. These guards are letting them go. Not only that, but as they go into the city they came to an iron gate, and I'm sure Peter is wondering what they are going to do about this iron gate. Then it says, "It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him." Sixteen guards, out cold, chains fall off, walking out, and the iron gate just opens on its own. This is a miraculous thing that is happening!

There are unseen realities that we don't see that can actually conquer all the things we can see. We have to remember that. We have to pray toward that end. There is no way out. There are sixteen guards, two guards, iron gate, and there is nothing the church can do. Except, oh yeah, there are unseen realities, and there is an army of angels, and just one angel can take all of this out. So, we pray towards that end. We pray to the Lord because we realize He can overcome all of the impossible situations that we find ourselves in, and that we find our friends in, our church in, and our world in. What do you do when there is nothing to do? You pray because God can do something when you can't do anything. God can move. God can move mountains, He can open gates, and He can put soldiers to rest. He can rescue people from prison. He can do all things.

Notice what it says, verse 11, "When Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me...'" Again, this is not Peter's escape; this is Peter's rescue. God rescued him from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting. Peter realized this is God's rescue. God did this, not me.

We have seen a prison cell with an impossible situation, but down the road there is a little house where the church is gathered to pray. They are on their knees praying. As they are praying, God is breaking Peter out of prison. An impossible situation has become possible because you have a group of people who are praying. But what we will see is that as they are praying, they are doubting the whole time they are praying. They are not praying full of faith saying God is going to do this. They are praying because it's the only thing they have left to do, but they have a lot of doubt. When it actually happens, they don't believe it.

### **Peter Arrives at the House**

Just notice when Peter goes to the house. Imagine being in that situation. You've been called to a prayer meeting at so-and-so's house. You go there, you bring some cookies. Somebody brings some punch. Everybody comes in, "Alright, it's time to pray." "Oh, what are we praying about?" "Oh, Peter's in prison and we are going to pray him out." "Alright, let's start praying." Now you all just take turns. You go around and you are just

fervently praying for Peter to get out. Then imagine that as you are praying, all of a sudden Peter shows up at the house. What would be your reaction? It would probably be like, "Yeah! We did it! Prayer works! Peter is here! Praise God!" That is not their reaction. When Peter comes knocking at the church, verse 12 says, "When he realized this [that God rescued him], he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying." Here are the verse 5 people who were praying, they are in this house. They are gathered together. They are praying. They can't do anything about Peter in prison, so they pray.

So in the middle of the prayer meeting, here is what verses 13-14 say happens, "And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. 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." Let's just play that out. They are in a circle. Everybody's praying...*Hey, um, John, could you just lead us in prayer? 'Yeah, God we just want Peter to get out. Please release Peter by your strong hand. Rescue Peter'...*And then all of the sudden a servant girl comes running in...*Hey! Peter's released! He is outside! He is at the door!*

Now imagine you are in that moment. What are you praying for? Peter's release, for God to release Peter. The servant girl comes in and "Guess what guys—stop praying! Our prayers have been answered! God released Peter!" So you would think everybody jumps up and starts cheering because God just answered their prayer. Instead, notice what verse 15 says, "They said to her, "You are out of your mind."" They are confused...*Wait, what are we doing here? Aren't we praying for Peter's release? No, that can't be. Peter can't be released. Just go on and get out of here. Alright John, now continue. Let's pray Peter out.*

Obviously, the servant girl continues. She is not going away. It says, "But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, 'It is his angel!'" So they are arguing back and forth. She continues to say...*No, he is out there; he is right there...No, he can't be there. That's impossible. He is in prison. There is no way, but hey John, would you keep praying that we get him out? But we know he is there!*

Now, let's just play this out. If you are at a prayer meeting and somebody says, "False alarm, it wasn't Joe at the door, instead it's an angel." What would be your response? Would you be like, "Oh that's cool, let's keep praying." Or would you go look at the angel! To me, it just got better! "Oh, it's not Peter. It's just an angel; you see those guys every day. Let's just keep rocking."

See, they are not going to the door because they don't believe it. They don't believe their own prayers. Which, I don't know about you, but that gives me a little bit of hope because often my prayers are full of faith, but they are also filled of doubt. How many of you pray like that? "God, I'm full of faith. I know you can do this." But in the back of your mind, you think it's not going to happen. That was them. I think they fully believed God could rescue Peter, but in the back of their minds, they didn't believe it was possible because when Peter comes, they don't believe it. They don't automatically react with – *Yes, God answered prayer! It was – No, it must be an angel, and we'll just ignore angels; they are not cool.* They are a believing people, but also a doubting people. The good news is that God can work through our prayers that have some doubts in them (which is pretty good because that's probably all of our prayers), and that God works to do something absolutely miraculous in this church that didn't fully believe.

So she is still trying to tell them. Verse 16 says, "But Peter continued knocking..." So, you've got this girl saying, *Peter's outside.* And Peter's like (*bang, bang, bang*), *Hey! I'm here!* ...They continue to argue with her that Peter can't be there, and then there is banging on the door. As Peter kept knocking, they finally went out, they opened the door, they saw him, and were amazed. Why were they amazed? They were amazed because they sort of believed it, but they didn't believe it... *Yes, we believe God can do all things, but this thing is really hard, so I'm not sure He'll be able to do this thing...* It's that faith/doubt. They are praying earnestly to God for Peter, but in the back of their minds, they aren't sure it can happen. But they got to witness it happen. They got to see, and their faith, I guarantee, was built through this event. So they probably prayed with a little more faith and a little less doubt next time.

And notice what Peter tells them in verse 17, "But motioning to them with his hands to be silent..." (I can imagine there is a lot of commotion going on here) "...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.' Then he departed and went to another place." So, they are just losing their minds. They are so excited, so pumped, and he tells them to go tell James. Why does he tell them to tell people? I think because the most obvious thing is when God works miracles, we should become megaphones. When God works a miracle in your life, when God works a miracle in somebody's life, when you have been praying for something and God actually does that something, when miracles happen, what should the church of God be? What should the people of God be? We should be megaphones. Hey, don't keep this hidden. Go tell! Go tell the others! Go tell people what God did! When God does stuff, we should tell what He did to bring glory to Him. This church saw a miracle, and all of the sudden they all become megaphones. That should be us. When we see God move, when we see God do the impossible (because He can do all things), when miracles happen, we should become megaphones and we should tell everyone we see how great God is and what God did.

### **The Death of Herod**

Now, we are going to see this Kingdom reversal. King Herod starts out as the one in charge, as the one who goes to kill the church. We will see it end with Herod dying and being eaten by worms. See, things aren't always as they appear. It always seems like evil is winning and the innocent lose. Seems like the bad continues and the good gets drowned out. It seems like there is so much injustice everywhere we look. God is going to signal to this church, and to us, that things aren't always as they appear, and I will deliver justice in this life or the next. Kings who kill Christians will find their own judgment, here or there.

Notice what happens to King Herod in verse 18, "Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod search 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." So, Herod killed the

guards. That's what happens. If you let a prisoner go, then you die. This wasn't like Peter sweet-talked the guards to let him go. No, this was a God-ordained miracle that Peter got out of prison.

Verses 20-22 say, "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, not of a man!'" Herod, in total control, the most powerful person in that providence puts on his best, takes his throne, and gives a wonderful speech. Then everyone shouts, "You are a god!" And Herod loves it. He is in control. He is got all the power. He puts to death whoever he wants. He does what he wants, but things aren't always as they appear.

Notice the next verse 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." Evil doesn't get the final word, God does. Those who do horrific things don't get the final word; God does, maybe not every time in this life, but certainly in the life to come. God will make all wrongs, right and He is given us just a little glimpse of what true justice from the Lord looks like.

### **Word of God Increases**

Notice that next "but" in verse 24, "But the word of God increased and multiplied." So, Herod is dead. The ruler who came after the church, who wanted to stop the church, he dies and the word of god increased and multiplied. Herod tried to kill the church. Herod dies and the church moves on, because in the end, God always wins. God always wins.

And then we see this little footnote in verse 25, "And Barnabas and Saul return from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark." So Saul and Barnabas are going back to Jerusalem as they are getting ready to go on mission.



So, I just want to land the plane and just reinforce that question. What do you do when there is nothing to do? They were in a situation where there was nothing they could do. What do you do when there is nothing to do? You pray. Prayer is not the least thing you can do. Prayer is the most thing you can do. Because for all of the seen things that we can look at, touch, and feel, all of the powers that we can see are no match for the realities we can't see. We have a God who has angels at His disposal. God can do the impossible. So, when we see things on the news, when we see things around us, when we hear of horrific situations, what do we do when we can't do anything? We pray because prayer is doing something. It is provoking the Lord to come and do.

One thing this text shows us is that our prayers don't always get answered. James died. Peter is rescued. How do we explain that? We really can't. God is sovereign; we have to trust Him. Peter got to live a little longer. But do you know what James got? He got called home unto the glorious Kingdom of God. Both got it pretty good. See, God doesn't always answer the prayers like we pray them, but God is always there, and He always hears. So, when we don't know what to do, we know what to do, and that's pray. For the next few moments, we are going to pray as a church. There are some things going on around us that need prayer. So if you would just bow your heads and close your eyes, we are going to make it real specific. First of all, we are going to pray of the country of Afghanistan. We are going to put all of our prayers directly toward that country. You can pray for multiple things. You can pray for the Americans in Afghanistan that they would be safely gotten out. You can pray for our military who are evacuating as the time is running out. You can pray for their efforts and their abilities. You can pray against the Taliban, against Isis, that God would do justice to them and that they would not prevail, but that they would lose. You can pray for the Afghan people who sided with us and who fought with us, and who now are perhaps going to be left behind. You can pray for them. You can pray for the church, the church in Afghanistan that right now they know that following Jesus means they have a target on their back. Folks, there is nothing we can do about that. So what do we do when there is nothing to do? We pray.

Now, let's move to a situation that you know. It might be a personal situation. It might be yourself. It might be a friend. It might be a situation that you know is just beyond anything. There is nothing you can do. Bring that situation, right now, before the Lord] Maybe it's the hurricane that's coming. Maybe it's a friend who's suffering. I'm thinking of Eric Gibbs, my friend, who's got meningitis right now, who's suffering right now and I can't do anything about it. But I'm going to pray for him right now. So think about a "Peter." Think about a situation that's impossible; that you need God to intervene in and pray for that right now.