

SEEING GOD IN THE MIDST OF A CRISIS

Acts 12:1-17

Throughout the course of time, man has been faced with one *crisis* after another. These *crises* are in reality a *spiritual war* ...a *war* that has continued to rage on every front since before creation. *God, His holy angels, and His chosen believers*...at battle against *Satan, his demonic hosts, and even the humanistic worldview and philosophy* embraced by *unbelievers*... those who are held captive by *Satan*, being used by him to do his will (**II Timothy 2:26**). Although *the outcome of the war has never been in doubt*, the battles are no less *real*.

The war *began in heaven* when *Lucifer* rebelled against his *Creator*. *Lucifer*, more commonly known as *Satan*, was cast from heaven, taking with him *one-third of the angels* (**Revelation 12:4**). And from that moment until the present, war has continued to rage between *Satan* and *God*.

Beginning with *Adam* and *Eve*, man has continued to battle God. Throughout history, man has pit his *impotence* against God's *omnipotence*. We see an example here in this passage.

In this passage, the one mentioned as *Herod the king* was *Herod Agrippa I*...the grandson of *Herod the Great*...and he reigned from **37-44 A.D.** Because of *Herod's* tenuous relationship with *Rome*, it was imperative that he maintain the *loyalty* and *control* of his Jewish subjects. One way to win favor with the resident Jewish authorities was to *persecute the hated Christians*...especially the *apostles*.

Accordingly, we see *James the brother of John* ordered to be **put to death with a sword**. And seeing that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also (**vs. 2-3**).

Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a

sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread (**vs. 1-3**).

I. RESPECT THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE: (**vs. 4**)

When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people (**vs. 4**)...

After *Herod Agrippa I* had *James put to death*...and the fact that it pleased the Jews...he decided to *go all out*. He reasoned that the *arrest* and *execution* of *Peter*, the *acknowledged leader of the Christians*, would forever *endear him* to his Jewish subjects. This was the *third time Peter* had been *arrested* (**Acts 4:3; Acts 5:18**). *Herod* chose the *Passover* season to assure that it would have *maximum effect*, since *Jerusalem* would be *crowded* with *devout Jewish pilgrims*.

Four squads of soldiers to guard him...these squads consisted of *four soldiers each*...with each *squad* rotated to keep watch on *Peter*. At any given time, *two* were in the cell *chained* to *Peter*...and *two* more were stationed *outside* the cell door (**vs. 6**).

Keep in mind...just because a *situation* or *crisis* *doesn't make sense to us* or doesn't seem to be *just* and *right* to us, it doesn't mean that it doesn't make *sense* to God. Allow God to be God. He is *sovereign*.

“*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.*”

~Isaiah 55:8-9

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

~Romans 8:28

II. REQUEST THE MINISTRY OF GOD’S PEOPLE:

(vs. 5)

So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God (vs. 5)...

While Peter was kept in the prison, the church responded as they usually did when facing a *crisis*...they **PRAYED** (Acts 4:23-31). They knew only God had the *power* to release Peter.

Fervently...Gk. *ektenos*, describes *the stretching of a muscle to its limits* (like the *Denver East cheerleader* in the video this week). It’s used in **Luke 22:44** to describe the Lord praying in **Gethsemane**. The church poured the *maximum effort* they were capable of into their *prayers* for Peter.

“Pray without ceasing...”

~I Thessalonians 5:17

“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

~Romans 8:26-27

When we believe that we have *heard from God* and we *respond accordingly*, and it *doesn’t turn out* the way that we expected...it isn’t that God failed. *We are the ones who failed* to hear God. (ie. we believe that God has told us while praying that someone is going to be healed...yet they

die. Or while praying, we believe that something is going to *happen a certain way* in accordance with how we are praying...yet it doesn’t turn out the way the way we have specifically prayed).

III. REST IN THE MERCY OF GOD’S PEACE: (vs. 6)

On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison (vs. 6)...

Peter was sleeping...the next morning he was set to be *executed*...yet he was *asleep*. Neither the *presence of the guards*...the *hardness of the cell floor*...the *wretchedness of the conditions of the prison*...nor the *imminent threat of execution* could disturb his rest.

Sleeping...Gk. *koimao*, describes *a deep and sound sleep*. He was so **sound asleep** that the **angel** had to prod him *to wake him up*. So in the *midst of a crisis*...

- Notice that **Peter wasn’t afraid of death**...even on the heel of **James** being **put to death with a sword** (vs. 2).
- **Peter** knows that *God’s people* are *praying for him* (vs. 5)...this is the same way **Nik Ripken** says the church overseas responds when one of their own is imprisoned.
- He’s *aware of God’s presence* and *promise* to him that he would *die later*...when he was *old* (**John 21:18-19**).

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

~Philippians 4:6-7

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

~Colossians 3:15

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

~I Peter 5:6-7

IV. RECOGNIZE THE MIGHT OF GOD’S POWER:

(vs. 7-11)

And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter’s side and woke him up, saying, “Get up quickly.” And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, “Gird 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 continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him (vs. 7-10)...

Herod learned the same truth that the Sanhedrin had learned before him (Acts 5:17-ff)...that *no prison can hold those whom God wants out.*

When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.” (vs. 11)...

Story of the pastor in Missouri...and Dave and Peggy Sharp...God’s use of *angels*.

V. REJOICE IN THE MAJESTY OF GOD’S PROTECTION: (vs. 12-17)

And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter’s voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. They said to her, “You are out of your mind!” But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, “It is his angel.” But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, “Report these things to James and the brethren.” Then he left and went to another place. (vs. 12-17)...

Don’t be surprised when God works.

Then he left and went to another place...Peter didn’t want to put all his fellow believers in jeopardy, and he knew that Agrippa would soon be looking for him, so he left.

Luke doesn’t tell us *where Peter went*...but regardless of where he went, Peter *fades from the scene* as far as the record of Acts is concerned. Apart from his brief appearance at the *Jerusalem council* (Acts 15)...this is the *last* we see of Peter. From here on out, the story revolves around Paul and his ministry.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- **When a crisis (*trials...testing...situations...circumstances*) arises...know that God is PRESENT and AT WORK. Diligently seek to see Him at work in that situation.**
- **When a crisis arises...respond with FERVENT PRAYER.**
- **When God WORKS...never cease to give Him the GLORY that is due Him. When you see God answer prayers...always respond by ascribing to Him the glory and praise that He is due. Worship Him!**