

The church's prayer'

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[0:00] Well, do you turn back in the Bible to Acts chapter 12. That would be really helpful for you. I get knocked down by Zimbabwe or something like that. Zimbabwe. I don't know. Chumbawamba.

There we go. Aaron knows his music, which is good for the music evening. I get knocked down, but I get up again. You're never going to keep me down. Those have been going around in my head this week.

Because as we begin looking at Acts chapter 12, it feels like the church gets knocked down. But spoiler alert, nothing can keep the church down. The church feels like it gets knocked down.

Why do I say that? Well, as you begin to read Acts chapter 12, you see that an apostle is dead. James, the brother of John, son of Zebedee. Dead.

Peter. And Peter. Imprisoned. Peter, like the leader among the apostles, really so influential in the book of Acts.

[1:40] He's imprisoned. And he's waiting his own execution. And Herod is on the loose.

Herod, a name which would strike fear into any believer. He's at work. He's made sure James was executed.

He's made sure Peter was imprisoned. And as David Peterson, a commentator, points out, Herod is trying to destroy the church by systematically removing the leadership of the church.

That's what he's going for. As an apostle is dead, as Peter's in prison, waiting his execution, and Herod is on the loose.

Who is this Herod? Well, he's not to be confused with the Herod the Great that we read about often around Christmas time. The one who wanted to kill all those baby boys, which meant Mary and Joseph had to flee as refugees to Egypt.

[2:49] We're not thinking about that, Herod. But we are thinking about his grandson. Herod, the Great that we know about, he sort of stands really as this sort of anti-Christ-like figure.

Trying to take God and his work down. Trying to destroy the work of God. And Herod that we come across here, his grandson, is really continuing the family business.

He's also trying to take God's work down. And he's doing a pretty good job. James is executed and Peter is being held very securely.

Do you notice that? Verse 4. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each.

Herod intending to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. And then verse 6. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers.

[3:56] And he had two chains, bound with two chains, holding him down. And sentries stood guard at the entrance. This couldn't be more secure. Peter is firmly held in the jail.

Two soldiers alongside him. Two heavy chains holding him down. Sentries standing guard in front of him.

Nothing could get around him. Nothing could take him away from here. Herod will have probably known that Peter and other apostles had miraculously escaped from jail in Acts chapter 5.

And learning the lesson here, Herod is making sure to do everything he can to make sure Peter can't escape and meets his end.

The church is really being knocked down, battered down. Herod's winning. The wicked is winning.

[4:59] Herod's being victorious over the church. Who were left really utterly powerless in this situation. It wasn't like maybe we'd do today if we disagreed with something the authorities were doing.

We'd maybe go and sign online petitions to get the government to act. Here the church don't have that power. They're knocked down.

But the church is not out. The church is not out. Have a look what they do in verse 5. So Peter was kept in prison.

But the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The church is not out. For the church prays. The church might be knocked down.

But they can still look up to their God on the throne. Because Herod in all his power and might cannot knock God off the throne of heaven.

[6:07] That we were picturing at the beginning of our service. They can come. And they can seek him in prayer. And that's the response that all Christian believers have the privilege of doing.

When we feel like we're being knocked down by some sort of trial. When we feel like the enemy is attacking us. When people are despising and forsaking us.

We can still come before the throne of God above and pray. We can go to the very highest place and pray.

This picture is a very famous picture of President Kennedy and his son John Jr.

Sitting under his desk in the most powerful office in the US. The Oval Office. His son could sit there before his dad.

[7:18] Because his dad rules. He's the president. He can go to the very highest place. And Christians this morning.

We can too. Not to the Oval Office. But the highest of thrones. Because we have a father who's in a high place.

We as children of the heavenly father. Have the privilege of going to the throne room. And praying. Even when things feel like they're being knocked down.

And the Christians here in Acts. They certainly do that. And we're told that they earnestly pray. That's what it says in verse 5.

And the last time Luke used that word earnestly praying. It was of Jesus. In the garden of Gethsemane. It's the same words.

[8:22] Thinking of a hard fervent prayer. Seeking the Lord amidst desperation. Maybe they pray.

Father see Peter's situation. Help him. Rescue him. Protect him. Protect us. Your people. From all of us being imprisoned and executed.

Of course praying to God is one thing. But does God hear those prayers? Does God answer those prayers? Well this passage should be an encouragement.

To us. If we're doubting. Does God hear? Does God act? Because he does. For firstly we see Peter sleeps.

Verse 6. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial. Peter was sleeping. Between two soldiers bound with two chains and sentries he stood guard at the entrance.

[9:35] Luke stresses. We've seen this already. He stresses how guarded and bound up Peter is. And it's the night before his trial. So that's enough to keep anybody awake.

But it says he sleeps. And extraordinarily if we turned a few chapters on to chapter 16.

We'd find more of God's people in jail. We'd find Paul and Silas. Chapter 16 verse 25. They're not sleeping but they are singing.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying. And singing hymns to God. And the other prisoners were listening to them. How can God's people sleep.

Or sing. In the jail cell. How can we sing through the midst of deep dark trials.

[10:36] How can we do that. Because we rest. In knowing. That our God's on the throne. We rest.

Knowing that he is sovereign. Over all things. Each one of us can. Sleep at night. Or sing at night. Whatever is going on. Because God reigns. Preacher. Who I enjoy listening to sometimes. Alistair Begg. In America.

Often says that. That Christians can sleep. On the soft. Pillow. Of God's providence. That wonderful. Even when we're being knocked down. Even when the enemy is against us. Even when our. Lives. And our world. Seems so full of trouble. They are being held in the hands.

[11:31] Of a good and faithful God. And little did the church know. Little did Peter know. As he was sleeping there that night.

Little did they know. What was going to happen next. As we see Peter. Rescued. Verse 7. Suddenly.

An angel of the Lord. Appeared. And a light. Shone in the cell. He struck. Peter on the side. And woke him up.

Quick. Get up. He said. And the chains. Fell off Peter's wrists. Extraordinary. Bright light. Fills that dark.

Jail cell. The Lord. Sends his angel. To come. And wakes him up. And those chains. They fell off. Miraculous. Even.

[12:31] More. Miraculous. I think. We don't see the guards doing anything. What are those soldiers doing there. Standing by his side. Well the great escape.

Can happen. Verse 8. Then. The angel said to him. Put on your clothes. And sandals. And Peter did so. Wrap your cloak. Around me. You. And follow me. The angel told him. Follow me. He said to Peter. And it's extraordinary.

Peter follows him out. And it tells us in verse 9. He doesn't have a clue. Whether Peter's dreaming. Whether he's dreaming. Seeing a vision. Or whether this is reality.

But amazingly. As we see. It is reality. Look at what happens. Verse 10. They pass the first. And the second guards.

[13:29] What are those guards paid for? And they came to the iron gate. And leading to the city. And it opened. By itself.

And they went through it. And when they had walked the length of one street. Suddenly. The angel. Left him. It's a miracle.

That's all we can say. It's miraculous. It's amazing. The church prayed. Peter slept.

Peter slept. People might have looked at that. And thought. Aren't they mad? But this shows that God. He is prayer. That God is a God.

Who can do miracles. Who can do wonders. A God. Who can do great things. A God. Who is stronger than the enemy. Stronger than the Herods of this world.

[14:30] You might just be thinking. Hang on. He did that for Peter. But what about poor James? He executed. That's where we need to be trusting.

God's good plans. Isn't it? Trust that. The God. Who is on the throne. Who is promised to build his church. We can trust.

Him. That whether. A faithful Christian. Servant. Ends up. Dying. For the sake of the gospel. Very. Far too soon.

Or whether they're given away. Through trial. And given many years. Of Christian service. We can trust. That God is working. And for James. He's executed. He gets to.

To be in the presence. Of his Lord. It doesn't mean. That's easy. For the church. But we trust. That God is at work.

[15:29] So the church. Has been. Knocked down. The luck. Is not out. The church. Praise. Peter. Sleeps.

In that jail cell. And Peter's. Rescued. The church. Is very much. Not out. You see.

Why I've got those words. In my head. I get knocked down. But I get up again. You're never going to keep. Me down. And so the church. Gets. Back up again. Peter.

Is freed. Have a look. Verse 11. Peter. Is freed. Then Peter. Came to himself. And said. Now I know. Without a doubt. That the Lord. Has sent his angel.

And rescued. Me from Herod's. Clutches. And from everything. The Jewish people. Were hoping. Would happen. The Lord. Has done this.

[16:23] He says. The Lord. Has rescued. Me from. Herod's. Clutches. I'm freed. The Lord. Is king. He's on the throne. Above Herod.

He's more powerful. Than the wicked. The Lord. Helped him. Escape. Herod's. Clutches. And so.

How. Is this church. In Jerusalem. Going to respond. How are they going to respond. To this answer prayer. Surely. With much rejoicing. Praise God.

Our prayers have been answered. Well have a look. Let's look at what happens. And it's rather amazing. When this had dawned on him.

He went to the house of Mary. The mother of John. Also called Mark. Where many people had gathered. And were praying. Peter knocked. At the outer entrance.

[17:21] And a servant. Girl came. Named Rhoda. Came and answered the door. And when she recognized. Peter's voice. She was. Overjoyed.

Of course she would be. Overjoyed. Peter's there. And so she runs back. With the news. And exclaimed. Peter is at the door. Oh man. Wow.

Praise God. No. Look. Look what happens. Verse 15. You're out of your mind. They told her. When she kept insisting.

That it was so. They said. It must be his angel. Hang on. Church. What did you pray for? What did you expect. Would happen? Which is a lesson to us.

It's a lesson to us. That the church responds. In earnest prayer. As a church. When dark situations arrive. We must turn to earnest prayer.

[18:21] The church here. Sets an example for us. But it also shows us. How we need to expect. That God will answer. Expect that God can do. Immeasurably more. Than all he asks. Or imagine. That Peter really is at the door. That Peter really.

Could be rescued. By the hand of our almighty God. Phil's helped us. Over this last year. To think and pray.

For what we would suggest. Are impossible things. Things that just seem. Too big for us. But actually.

We can recognize. By faith. As we pray. That nothing. Is impossible. For God. And recognize too. That God loves.

[19:17] His church. And as we've said. Promises to build. His church. And the gates of Hades. Won't prevail against it. And if God's committed. To that. Then we can.

Expect him. To. Work. And use our prayers. And answer our prayers. William. Carey. Known as the father.

Of modern missions. Once said. In a sermon. This famous phrase. Expect. Great things. From God. Attempt. Great things.

For God. We can pray. To God. With great. Expectation. Because he can do.

Great things. And this passage. Shows us that. And because of that. We can also attempt. To do. Great things. Trusting that he will. Work.

[20:14] Through us. God. That certainly. Encouraged me. As we. We look at the. The next little bit of. Season of. Our church's life. Was to go. The music evening.

And the. Christmas craft event. And other Christmas services. Happening. And there's all sorts. Of opportunities. To invite people in here. To hear the gospel. At a time.

When maybe they wouldn't. Think about it. Any other time. Of the year. As we've got. Lots of leaflets. And banners. Being printed. Let's pray.

As we're attempting. This great things. Let's pray. To God. Expecting. Great things. Expecting. That he can work. He can work. Even. In the darkness. That he can work. In the darkness. Of this city. That he can work.

[21:08] Through the. Despite. The Herods. Despite. The wicked. Who would stand. Against us. So Peter.

Was in jail. He's now free. The church. Sort of gets. Back up again. And at the beginning. Of this passage. Herod. Seemed like.

He was triumphing. But now. As we come. To the end of it. We. We see Herod. Knocked down. Herod's. Knocked down. Whilst God's plans.

Are working. Herod's plans. Are failing. A few weeks ago. Coming away.

From holiday. In the Isle of Wight. Coming off the. Ferry. At Portsmouth. We heard. On the radio. That. That. Four. Raccoons. Had escaped.

[22:04] From. A zoo. On the Isle of Wight. So we thought. Phew. We're off the island. Thus. Began. A search. Thus. Began. What I can imagine.

Being a great. Commotion. And that. Helps me. At least. A little. To understand. What's going on. In verse 18. Read. Have a look.

At this. With me. In the morning. There was no. Small. Commotion. Among the soldiers. As to what. Had become. Of Peter. Peter. Had.

Miraculously. Escaped. And this. Causes. A great. Commotion. Amongst. Herod. And his. Soldiers. What's. Happened. To Peter. He was. Right.

There. We had. To. We. We. Promised. We. Weren't. Asleep. Herod. Was. Displeased. So. Displeased. That. Look. What. He.

[22:56] Does. To. His. Guards. In. Verse. 18. 19. Even. After. He. Had. Made. A. Thorough. Search. For. Him. Did. Not. Find. Him. He. Cross. Examine. The. Guards.

And. Order. That. They. Be. Executed. Herod's. Plans. Were. Failing. Miserably. And. He's. Executing. His. Guards. Herod.

Tried. To. Carry. On. But. Actually. Things. Became. Rather. Not. Straightforward. For. Him. And. His. Rule. If. Have. Look. At. Verse. 20. Had. Been. Quarreling.

With. The. People. Of. Tyre. And. Sidon. And. Securing. The. Sword. Of. Blastus. Or. Blastus. A. Trusted.

Personal. Servant. Of. The. King. They. Asked. For. Peace. Because. They. Depended. On. The. King's. Country. For. Their. Food. Supply. Blastus.

[23:53] His. Own. Colleague. Has. Been. Sort. Of. Turned. Against. Him. He's. Got. Demands. Coming. Verse. 21.

Look. At. What. Herod. Continues. To. Do. On. The. Appointed. Day. Herod. Wearing. His. Royal. Robe. Sat. On. His. Throne. And. Delivered. A. Public. Address. To. The. People. He's.

Wearing. His. Fine. Clothes. He's. Wearing. His. Royal. Outfits. He's. Showing. To. The. People. His. Greatness. Even. Though. Everything. Seems. Out. Control. He's. Still.

King. He's. Still. Ruling. He's. Still. Mighty. And. The. People. Agree. Verse. Twenty. Two. They. Shouted. This. Is. The. Voice. Of. A. God. Not. Of. A. Man.

Wow. What. A. Man. They. Thought. What. A. Ruler. Perhaps. It's. A. A. Bit. Like. How. People. In. America. Right. Now. Are.

[24:48] Viewing. Donald. Trump. As. A. Hero. A. Survivor. Of. Assassination. Attempts. A. Great. Political. Comeback. And. It. Is. Extraordinary. But.

The. Rulers. Of. This. World. All. The. Rulers. Of. This. World. Need. To. Hear. The. Warning. Of. This. Passage. Did.

Not. Give. Praise. To. God. An. Angel. Of. The. Lord. Struck. Him. Down. And. He. Was. Eaten. By. Worms. And. He. Died. Herod.

Knocked. Down. And. He. Out. Herod. Is. Out. He. It. Was. Powerful. But.

The. Lord. Was. Saying. He. Not. A. God. People. Called. Out. This. Is. The. Voice. Of. A. God. Not. Of. A. Man. The. Power. Had. Gone. To. His. Head. And.

[25:45] He. Was. Just. Trying. To. Trying. To. Stand. Against. God's. People. And. This. Is. A. Warning. A. Warning. The. Bible. Gives. Us. Elsewhere.

Maybe. We. Think. Of. Some. To. It. Because. It's. A. Some. To. Like. Warning. To. Kings. To. The. Rulers. Therefore. You. Kings. Be. Wise. Be. Warned.

You. Rulers. Of. The. Earth. Serve. The. Lord. With. Fear. And. Celebrate. His. Rule. With. Trembling. Kiss. His. Son. Or. He. Will. Be. Angry. And. Your. Way. Will. Lead. To. Your. Destruction.

For. His. Wrath. Can. Flare. Up. In. Moment. Blessed. Are. All. Who. Take. Refuge. In. Him. We. See. That. Here.

Don't. We. Herod. Does. Not. Pow. The. Knee. To. God. And. God. Is. Angry. And. By. The. End. Is. A. Real. Sad. Humiliation.

[26:38] Of. This. King. Who. Thought. He. Was. Bigger. Than. God. Eaten. By. Worms. And. Died. Whereas.

For. God's. Church. The. Story. Is. Different. Have. A. Look. At. Verse. 24. But. The. Word. Of. God. Continued. To.

Spread. And. Flourish. This. Chapter. Shows. Us. That. Instead. Of. Evil. Winning. God's. Word. Is. Winning. Evil. Loses. Whilst.

God's. Word. Triumphs. The. Word. Of. God. Continues. To. Spread. And. Flourish. Church. Church. And. This.

Whole. Chapter. It. Can. Point. Us. Again. To. What. That. Word. Shows. Us. The. Good. News. Of. The. Gospel. The. Good. News.

[27:31] That. Jesus. The. Head. The. The. Church. He. Went. On. Trial. As. Peter. Was. Awaiting. Trial. He. Was. Sentenced.

To. His. Own. Execution. To. Crucifixion. On. The. Cross. And. His. Body. Was. Buried. In. A. Dark. Tomb. But.

Then. Like. In. Peter's. Prison. Cell. Light. Shown. In. The. Darkness. Jesus. Rose. Triumphant. From.

The. Grave. And. So. Of. Course. Of. Course. God. Can. Shine. Light. Even.

Into. The. Darkest. Prison. Cell. And. Free. His. Servant. From. There. And. That's. What. He's. Done. Even.

[28:26] In. Our. Own. Lives. This. Wonderful. Verse. And. The. Bible. Says. This. Let. Light. Shine.

Out. Of. Darkness. Those. Are. God's. Words. In. Genesis. One. God. He. said. Let. Light. Shine.

Out. Of. Darkness. Made. His. Light. Shine. In. Our. Hearts. To.

Give. Us. The. Light. Of. The. Knowledge. Of. God's. Glory. Display. In. The. Face. Of. Christ. God. Works. Miracles. In.

The. Prison. Cell. But. God. Has. Also. Worked. Miracles. In. Our. Own. Hearts. All. Of. Us. Were. Once. Lost. In. Darkness. Held.

In. Chains. By. Sin. But. God. Has. Intervened. And. Shine. The. Light. Of. Lord. Jesus. In. Our. Hearts.

[29:18] Exposed. The. Darkness. Of. Sin. And. Shown. Us. The. Glory. Of. Jesus. God. Himself. Who. Can. Be. Our. Savior. Maybe.

You're. Here. This. Morning. Maybe. You're. Here. This. Morning. And. You. You. You. Recognize. Darkness. In. Our. World. You. Recognize. The. Herods. Of. Our. World. Today. You.

See. The. Brokenness. And. Suffering. In. Our. World. And. Maybe. Even. This. Morning. You're.

Aware. Of. Your. Own. Darkness. Your. Own. Sin. The. Things. That. You. Do.

That. That. Are. Not. Good. That. Don't. Feel. Right. But. The. Good. News. This. Morning. Is. That. We. Believe. In. In. A. God. Who.

Is. Light. In. Him. No. Darkness. At. All. And. He. Can. Shine. Into. Your. Heart. And. He. Eternal.

[30:18] Life. In. Heaven. With. Him. And. As. A. Church. This. Morning. Let's.

Be. Encouraged. That. We. Have. A. God. Who. Triumphs. Over. Darkness. Who. Triumphs. Over. The. Evil. Powers.

Of. Our. Worlds. Over. The. Evil. Herods. Who. Try. And. Stand. Against. God. And. His. People. And. How. We. Need.

Like. This. Church. To. Keep. Earnestly. Praying. Earnestly. Praying. And. Expecting. By. Faith.

Great. Things. From. God. And. Attempting. By. Faith.

Great. Things. For. God. Believing. That. God. The. Great. Lord. Of. Light. Who. Broke. Into. The. Darkness. Of. The. Team. Who.

[31:10] Broke. Into. The. Darkness. Of. Peter's. Prison. Cell. Who's. Broken. Into. The. Darkness. Of. Our. Hearts. Believing. That. He. Can. Work. And. Break. Through. Into. The. Darkness.

Of. People's. Lives. In. Our. City. That. He. Can. Open. Doors. And. Make. The. Way. Open. Like. The. Way. Was. Made. So. Open. For. Peter. To. Escape. That.

He. Can. Open. The. Way. For. The. Gospel. Message. To. Go. For. For. Clearly. In. This. City. And. So.

Why. Don't. We. Pray. Now. Along. Those. Lines. Let's. Pray. Our. Heavenly.

Father. We. Thank. You. So. Much. For. How. You. Worked. In. That. Passage. How. You. Worked.

[32:01] Through. Your. People's. Prayers. How. You. Freed. Peter. From.
That. Dark. Prison. Cell. And. Father. We. Thank. You. So. Much. For.
Your. Work.

Of. Grace. In. Our. Life. Thank. You. For. For. Exposing. Our. Darkness. And. Shining. The. Light.
Of. The. Lord. Jesus. Into. Our. Lives. And.

Father. How. We. Pray. That. You. Would. Use. Us. And. Use. Churches. Across. This. City. To.
Spread. The. Gospel. Message.

How. We. Pray. That. You. Would. Do. Great. Things. Across. This. City. And. Bring. So. Many.
More. To. Know. The. Lord. Jesus. To. Know. The. Light.

Of. The. Gospel. That. To. Know. The. Light. Of. The. World. To. Walk. In. Him. And. How. We.
[32:54] Pray. This. Thank. you. That. We. Can. Pray. This. Help. Us. To.
Keep. Praying. Earnestly. For. These. Things. And. Expecting. You. To.
Work. And.

We. Ask. This. In. Jesus. Name. Amen. We're. Going. To. End. Our. Time. By. Singing. Of. The.
Lord. God. Who. Is. On. His. Throne. Singing. This. Great. Hymn. Crown. Him. With. Many. Crowns.
The. Lamb. Upon. His.

Throne. So. Let's. Stand. And. We'll. Sing. Together.