

Pray Until the Chains Break

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[0:00] And it's Acts chapter 12, verses 1 to 17. It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.

He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.

This happened during the festival of unleavened bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each.

Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

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

[1:36] 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. Then the angel said to him, put on your clothes and sandals. And Peter did so.

Wrap your cloak round you and follow me, the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening.

He thought he was seeing a vision. He passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself and went through it.

When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left them. 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.

[2:40] 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, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door.

When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed, she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, Peter is at the door. You're out of your mind, they told her.

When she kept insisting that it was so, she said, It must be his angel. But Peter kept on knocking.

When they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this, he said.

And then he left for another place. Now let's continue to worship God as we sing the song in Christ alone.

[3:45] Thanks for your prayers, Gordon. I'm sure you've all seen these around and you've heard myself and a couple of others talk about them.

Nice bluish, mountainous sort of front cover there. There's a little sticker in the back, which says, Westerhills Baptist Church, where you belong. But feel free to take one of these ones home.

One of those particular ones. If you haven't got a Bible at home or you'd like to use it, have it as a gift from us. We'd like that to happen. And so, thinking on this passage and what we've been today. Sleeping. It's important to sleep. And it's important to sleep well.

And it takes a few things, a few important necessities, to get a good night's sleep.

[4:57] Such as, the right diet, health, and all such things. And, of course, peace.

Peace of mind. Having, having nothing. Zilch to worry about. Nothing to fear. That enables one to get a good night's sleep. Now, as Christians, health problems, or whatnot, will still, at times, keep us awake.

Let's be realistic. I'm sure you have all experienced that. I have. But, but, if there is one thing that should never keep us awake, it would be, and it should be, worry, fear.

We should be the ones who are never kept awake by worry or fear. for we are the ones at peace and at one with the God of creation.

[6:25] As I say, I'm not saying we're never awake with worry. Again, I've had my moments. But I am saying because we have God, if anyone shouldn't be, it should be us.

The worldwide Christian church. In fact, we need be a bit more like Peter.

This chapter begins by telling us that Herod was dangerously on the move Herod was charged by Rome to keep law and order across these lands to maintain peace.

And so, it was within his interest to please the Pharisees, Sadducees and whatnot. And so, Herod is on to it.

And he does so by attacking the Christian church. He's thinking they're the new ones and they're causing a stir.

[7:49] The Pharisees hate them so I, mighty, powerful Herod, I declare war on them. I will destroy them and then get peace across the lands.

And so, he gets James. Good old James, the brother of John, one of the original twelve, one of Jesus' inner three.

That James. He gets him and he has him killed. And when Herod seen how this was met with approval among the Jews, he next went after Peter, the boss.

He's thinking let's cut this thing off from the top. So, he has Peter in prison awaiting trial, awaiting execution.

And so, verse six says, the night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping.

[9:12] Sleeping. Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, with more guards at the entrance.

Now, come on. If there was ever a night that Peter was validated to be awake and unable to sleep, with worry and fear, this is it.

He is due to be killed tomorrow. Anyone else would be up all night, petrified. And shouldn't Peter also be?

After all, this is the same Peter, the same guy, who on the night of Jesus' arrest, grabbed the sword, ran, followed behind secretly, lied when he was scared that they were going to catch him out, started cursing and swearing when he thought he was near the brink, and even with fear denied. That's the same guy who acted like that when Jesus was facing his arrest. death. And here he is now, facing the same fate as James.

[10:34] And he's fast asleep, conked out, sleeping like a log. What, just exactly what, has become of Peter?

He's now finally at full peace with the one true God. The one true God of creation. Peter now really knew God.

And he knew he could trust God. Folk, this is the ultimate example of what it means to trust God. And let's be clear here, let's be clear, it is unlikely that Peter expected to get out, unlikely. I think given what had just happened to James, we can safely assume Peter expected to also be killed. So how was he able to sleep? Again, because he was at peace with God. so whatever tomorrow held, he could face it with God.

[11:55] So no point staying up all night worrying, no point wasting sleep and anxiety, it's in your hands God, lights out sleep.

fellow followers of Jesus, to myself also, have we forgotten this?

Have we overlooked this fact that we also have what Peter had? How many of us lose sleep or spend days in worry at what might happen tomorrow?

When truth is, everything of tomorrow is in God's hands. And because we are at one with him, we can rest assured he has our backs.

And let's keep it all in the open here a moment. It does not mean that it will always go as you hope.

[13:11] Knowing God has our backs and we can sleep in peace does not mean it will always go as we hope. But it means it will go in accordance with God's best for you.

Whether that means the miraculous escape, example like Peter, or the miraculous ushering into heaven, example of James.

Both. were God's best for two separate individuals. ones. Why was Peter spared here at this point whilst James is taken to heaven?

Similar questions still exist today, don't they? They're difficult questions and the answer is really just as difficult.

We do not see all that God sees. We do not know all that God knows.

[14:35] We do not know what is going on beyond this world. we do not know what the enemy is planning for each individual one of us.

And an amount of other very serious things, we have no idea about it. All we know is what is in front of us right now. That's it. That's all we know.

And so in this life, we will not know why one faces trials and early death. And why another doesn't. We won't know in this life.

Here in Acts, John, James' brother, John and James, were two brothers, followed Jesus all their lives. And here in the book of Acts, John, his brother, did not know why his brother James was taken and Peter spared.

But there was he in the middle. They were the three in their core, Peter, James, and John. John, his brother is taken, his fellow companion in the work is spared.

[15:46] For now. But John knew what he needed to know. He knew what he needed to know.

And what he needed to know was enough. And do you know what he knew? Because he wrote it. He wrote everything he knew.

And he wrote, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have it. John's brother is taken, Peter is spared, and all John knows is that God loves the world so much he gave his son.

And he also wrote those words, see what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.

His brother is taken, his colleague is spared, and all John knows is that God lavishes love on him. And don't miss this. Over the next 40 years, John watched all the other original disciples be killed.

[17:04] And he finally exiled. And yet all of his writings are crampacked with God is love, love, love, love, love, and even more love.

Read them, read John's books, nothing but love. The same guy who watched every other disciple die early. Again, we ask why and how?

And again, we answer because like Peter, that night in the cell, he knew Jesus is alive, God is on the throne, and God's best will be given him.

And so it is for us. We know we are at one with the one true God of creation, that he is alive, he is on the throne, and he will do his best for us, whether or not it works out as we think it should, whether or not it's the Peter example of escape, or it's the James example of ushering into heaven. Whatever it is, God's will be done, because it's God's best for us. And so for Peter, as we've said, God's best for him at this point is rescuing.

[18:22] And what a truly remarkable rescue it is. The Christians back at John Mark's home are all at prayer, and on the agenda is Herod's attacks and things like that, but particularly Peter in prison.

Rescue Peter. And so we have, as we have explored at this point, to get him out. And so an angel turns up in the cell.

Get up, Peter. And off Peter goes, finally arriving himself at the door of the prayer meeting. Rhoda, you go answer.

We will keep praying for Peter, et cetera. Everything's a little on edge. Who is it? Checks before opening the door. Peter, I'm here, let me in.

Peter leans in to go through an open door, but nope, doesn't open. Rhoda, with excitement, is off to tell the rest, Peter, Peter, he's at the door.

[19:28] And in good old true human fashion, they all say, ah, he's at the door, is he? Yeah, yeah, come on and sit down. Someone's had a one too many. Pete's at the door?

Of course, you're out of your mind. You're crazy. Now, come on, put yourself together, get in here and help us pray for his escape. And she has to press on.

He is, he is. And poor Peter is at the door, knocking away, I'm sure watching his back, for the guards coming. In my mind, I can see the angel down the street thinking, I've just opened sealed and locked doors for you.

I've taken you out of an iron gate, and you humans can't even let him into a front wooden door to a prayer meeting. God has just rescued Peter from prison, and he can't even get into the prayer meeting.

And inside when Rhoda won't quit, they actually find it easier to believe there's a guardian angel struggling to get into the door, that's Peter. But finally, on the back of Rhoda's persistence, open the door and bang, it's Pete.

[20:40] And everyone is going nuts. Rhoda, it's Peter, why didn't you tell us? Come on, get in here. Pete, hi, why, when? And he has to get his hands up, quieten everyone down, so we can relay the incredible event of God rescuing him.

And I truly love how honest the Bible is. Wouldn't it sound better for God if he were able to have written, they all just fully believed, they all just got on with it and fully believed, but nope, there is no painting over the truth, we're told exactly how it happened, because truth is this is better for God, because it shows he clearly understands us humans.

One of Jesus' reasons for coming was to fully grasp the human life, and here by such writings we can tell God fully understood us.

prayer meeting, and so I'd like to think that for the ones in that prayer meeting, their focus on prayer changed for the better. And Westerhill's Baptist Church, let's also, let it remind us of the power of prayer.

Here was a first century church prayer meeting, and things were happening. Prayer is the powerhouse of the church. Prayer is the engine of the church, and sadly, sadly, because it is such a powerhouse, because it is such a stronghold, and because the enemy knows it is a powerful, powerful engine.

[22:32] Sadly, he works hard at keeping many of you away from Wednesday evenings, and he works hard at keeping some of you from your personal prayer life as well, because he knows if we were in here on a Wednesday evening, full house praying away, he wouldn't be able to get against us.

Prayer is the powerhouse, the engine room of what happens in the rest of the week. Westerhill's Baptist Church, don't let the enemy have your prayer life.

prayer, we need to be in prayer individually and together. Both are important. And let's be encouraged that prayer works.

And on the back of prayer, chains are broken. Be confident in your prayers, to really appeal to the Lord, to cry out, to proclaim and claim in his name, to declare and authorize in his name, to pray truly mountain moving, faith filled prayers.

And whatever God's best is, will be done. And as you pray about your life, your loved ones, your friends, your church, let us also never forget to keep praying for those in chains.

[23:59] Because like Peter, in this prison cell, there is still Christian brothers and sisters imprisoned around the world today. And Scripture tells us, continue to remember those in prison as if you yourself were together in prison with them.

And those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering with them. So let's make sure we are doing this together and individually because the Bible tells us to.

If you're not sure who or what exactly to pray for in that area, ask John or attend the monthly mission meetings on the second Wednesday of the month and be educated on how you can pray for such topics.

And you will see God answer prayer. I guarantee you that. Answered prayer proves our God is alive and is on the throne.

That he is the mighty one in charge. And this chapter certainly proves that God is alive and that God is in charge. Remember how this chapter started?

[25:14] Mighty Herod was set tonight to destroy the church. Well, look how it ends. Verse 21. Herod coming to give a speech.

On the appointed day, Herod wearing his royal robe sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, this is the voice of a God, not of a man. Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to spread and flourish. The chapter began with mighty Herod coming out to declare war on the Christian church to end it. By the end of the chapter, Herod is defeated.

Herod is dead. The Roman Empire, has taken a beating. That little prayer meeting in that house was more powerful than the entire Roman Empire.

[26:29] That prayer meeting was able to control Rome because that prayer meeting was all to, through, and for the one true living God.

And so the final verse says, but the word of God continued to spread and flourish. the very thing Herod set out to destroy remains flourishing.

And Herod defeated. Such is the power of prayer, which is why I encourage, pray with us, join us on the Wednesday evening, pray with us. It is the powerhouse, it is the engine room, it is where things will happen, and this Wednesday evening it will be a full prayer meeting as such.

So come out and pray with us. And today be assured that the prayers of ordinary, decent Christians is still mightier, still stronger than all the powers and superpowers of the whole wide world.

God's love. And so by knowing this, by believing this, and that's if you really, really genuinely believe this, then like Peter in the chains between two soldiers, you can leave it all, all the big questions, all the big worries, all the big fears, the big wonderings, with God, knowing that he is truly sovereign.

[27:58] So whatever happens, whether it's how you expect it to or not, you know it is indeed God's best, his very best for you.

And so like Peter, put it light and try and sleep in peace. Let's pray. Lord, we don't pretend that it's easy.

We acknowledge it's difficult. And we thank you that we can pray to you, our God, the only God who knows because you were here and experienced it.

And so help us take these words forth into the rest of our lives, giving worry after worry to you.

And sleep in peace. And Lord, we acknowledge the wondrous examples of James and Peter, and we trust it's all in your hands.

[29:11] And Lord, may we with excitement tell other people what you're offering. The enemy has blinded people so easily, they really think that what you're offering is a controlled religious joy-kill that couldn't be further from the truth.

You're offering a direct conversation with the God of creation. Who wouldn't want that, Lord? Who wouldn't want a direct line to the God of creation?

So help us tell people that's what you're offering. In the name of Jesus, Amen. Now let's make that song earlier our song and our prayer, Jesus strong and kind.

Thank you, God. Be afraid to join us at six if you can. And so as we started with, do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And so Lord, send us forth to live as such. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Mary.