

THE CHURCH WAS EARNESTLY PRAYING FOR PETER

Acts 12:1-25 (5)

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him

In today's passage Peter fell into the clutches of King Herod. Now this was not the same Herod who tried to kill baby Jesus. (Matthew 2:16) That was Herod the Great. It was also not the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist in prison (Matthew 14:1,10) That was Herod Antipas. No. King Herod in today's passage was known as Herod Agrippa. He was the grandson of Herod the Great and nephew of Herod Antipas. Nevertheless, **he was also a mad man, just like his grandfather and uncle. Tragically, in today's passage, this King Herod seized Peter. He then locked him up in a maximum security jail. And was determined to publically execute Peter after the Festival of Unleavened Bread. BUT, while Peter was kept in prison, the church was earnestly praying to God for him.** Then, amazingly, the Lord **sent his angel to miraculously rescue Peter from Herod's power and control. May the Lord use His word today, to unite us as a church to also earnestly pray to God.....for others in need of God's deliverance!**

Let's look at verse 1. One day King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church. Now, we all know how the Jewish Leaders persecuted the early church, right?! But why did King Herod also persecute the believers? It was purely a political maneuver to please the Jewish leaders and so strengthen his rule in Judea. But that was not all Herod did. Look at verse 2. (Read) The Contemporary English Version puts it more bluntly. It reads: Herod ordered soldiers to cut off the head of James with a sword. He did so without any warning or delay. Once the soldiers saw James, they simply held him downand immediately..... there and then on the spot..... cut off James' head for all to see.

How tragic, right!? I mean, James was a precious child of God. Once, he was one of Jesus' top 3 disciples. And after Jesus' ascension he became an influential leader in the Jerusalem church. As fellow sons of daughters of God, we respect James, right! We love him even now as our precious brother in Christ. But not Herod! In fact, Herod felt the exact opposite about James. Yes, he hated the church. And despised James as a servant of God! And so without any hesitation, cut off his head. **Here we cannot but see Satan's murderous spirit in Herod. Indeed, if there is someone who hates God's children more than Herod, than it is Satan.**

But how did Jews respond to James' gruesome execution? Look at verse 3. They approved of it!! (Unbelievable!!) Yes, they were pleased with Herod's tactics to destroy the church! So to please the Jews even more, Herod proceeded to seize Peter also.....to cut off his head as well. Fortunately for Peter, however, Herod arrested him during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. To execute Peter during this Holy Festival would surely have offended the Jews. So..... (look at verse 4) after arresting him, Herod put Peter in prison, until after the Festival of Unleavened Breadwhen he intended to bring Peter out for public trial and execute him; just like James.

Now you will remember that this was not the first time Peter was arrested and put in prison. Once, the Sadducees also arrested Peter and placed him in a public jail, do you remember? And what happened then? Yes, with God's help Peter managed to escape! (5:18-21) So, this time..... Herod made double sure....even triple sure.....Peter could not escape. First of all, he placed Peter in a maximum security prison in Jerusalem with thick high walls, secure iron gates and several guarding posts. In addition, look again at verse 4, Herod hand[ed] Peter over to be guarded.....not by one or two soldiers only! No! He handed Peter over to be guarded by FOUR SQUADS..... of FOUR soldiers each. So that is 16 well trained soldiers, whose only purpose for those 7 days was to guard Peter..... AND THESE SOLDIERS TOOK ABSOLUTELY NO CHANCES. Look at verse 6. They bound Peter securely to the wall by placing two heavy iron chains around his wrists. Then they arranged that while two soldiers stood guard OUTSIDE Peter's cell..... For the other two soldiers to stand guard ...WITHIN Peter's cell!! One ON EITHER SIDE OF PETER. So if Peter even moved his finger, the soldiers looked at him with threatening eyes!! With each of these measures, King Herod's clutches gripped stronger and stronger around Peter. Until humanly speaking, there was no way for Peter to

break free. He was completely trapped! Locked up so tightly that he had barely any room to move even his foot. How terrible, right!!

But look at verse 5. Can we please read today's key verse together? So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. Peter's situation in prison was utterly hopeless. His fate was sealed and realistically, He had mere days left to live before his head would be cut off!!! BUT the Jerusalem church did not give up on Peter!!! Despite the threat of ending up just like Peter, they did not flee Jerusalem.....they did not abandon their brother in Christ. But united as one church..... and was earnestly praying to God for Peter..... the whole time he was kept in prison. We cannot but be moved by the love the Jerusalem church showed for Peter in this dark time in his life.

Now, we all know that it is not easy to pray for others; right? Generally, when we pray for someone else we do so purely because we feel obligated to. But this was not the case with the Jerusalem church. Look again at verse 5. It says that the church was EARNESTLY praying. This means they prayed very seriously to God..... with genuine feelings Or shall we say.....sincere and genuine concern for Peter. The question is, how can we also pray for someone like this? It's only possible when we remember and hold on to Jesus' love for you and me personally. The truth is, like Peter, you and I also fell into the clutches of Satan. Yes, because of our sin, we too were locked up in a cell, tied down by chains and closely guarded to one day face God's judgment. Indeed, like Peter, our situation was completely hopeless. Yet, Jesus remembered you and me. Jesus came all the way from heaven into this fallen world. He became human like you and me, and sacrificed His life on the cross, to crush Satan's head and break off the chains of sin and death that tied us down. So now, because of Jesus' love and care, you and I are free to live a new life.....no longer tied down but free with hope and great possibility. If this was what the Lord did for you and me, then He surely want to do so for those around us. If only we earnestly pray to God for them..... by remembering and holding Jesus' love in our hearts. Just like the Jerusalem church prayed to God for Peter.

Then what is God's promise.....if we do so? Let's look at verses 6-11. (Read) When we listen to this remarkable testimony, we cannot but praise God for.....so effortlessly..... rescuing Peter like this from Herod's seemingly unbreakable clutches. Do you remember those unbreakable chains on Peter's wrists? God made them to simply fell off. What about the two guards standing on either side of Peter? And the sentries outside his cell? God easily blinded them and closed their ears. Without the soldiers even noticing a thing.....Peter put on his clothes and sandals, he wrap[ped] his cloak around him and followed the angel out of the prison. With not a single guard making even a sound! It was so remarkable that Peter had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening. In fact, Peter thought he was seeing a vision. But it was as real as you and me walking out of this bible house today! Peter left the two guards behind in his cell. He passed the two sentries at the entrance.....then he passed the first station of guards.....and later also the second station of guards. Finally, he and the angel came to the Iron Gate leading to the city. Unbelievably, it opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left Peter. A free man out of harm's way!!

It is a truly remarkable testimony, right!? One moment Peter was securely chained down in a cell. The next moment he is standing a free man in one of the streets in Jerusalem, safe and secure. Ready to live the life God called him for. Have you ever heard of a prisoner who simply walked out of prison? This sounds like a scene from a matrix movie!! Did it really happen like this? Peter was asking the same question. But look again at verse 11. When Peter came to himself he said: "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches." Even some believers who had gathered and were praying at the house of Mary could not at first believe that Peter was out of prison. But they were astonished when they opened the door and saw Peter with their own eyes!! (12-17) Praise the Lord who so gracefully used the church's prayers to bring Peter out of prison!! And so deliver him from Herod's power and control.

There are so many people like Peter who are in desperate need of God's deliverance. They are still trapped within Satan's clutches.....chained down by sin and doomed to face eternal destruction. Not because God is unable to deliver them. But because the church is not earnestly praying to God for

them. What about our ministry? Do you know of anyone who needs earnest prayer? A friend.....a family member.....or someone in our ministry? Please, let's talk about how we as a ministry can unite to earnestly pray to God for them!!

I have a younger brother. His name is Anton. He became addicted to sleeping pills when life became too hard for him to bare. But while under the influence of these pills he fell and permanently injured himself. He can no longer work and seemingly never live a normal life again. He lost his house, his car, and all his possessions to the bank. Now he is not only tied down with physical pain but also with severe depression. Honestly speaking. I and my family have tried everything to help him. But can honestly testify, only God can rescue him from the clutches of Satan. Only God can break the chains of sin and death that has gripped his heart so tightly. Please, pray with me for Anton. Not for physical healing. But to receive God's salvation in his heart, to live a new life that glorifies God.....regardless of his physical condition. He is my dearest brother and desperately needs our earnest prayers. What about you? Let's unite as a church to earnestly pray to God for our loved ones. Surely, God will rescue them just as He rescued Peter, and bring them out to live a new life for the glory of God.

In conclusion: King Herod seemed all powerful. And his clutches gripped Peter so tight that it seemed impossible to break free. Yet, before God, Herod was powerless to hold on to Peter! God effortlessly broke Peter out of prison. Then, days later, He struck Herod down, and he was eaten by worms and died. (23) Indeed, most of the times when we look at people or even ourselves.....it seems impossible to break free from Satan's clutches.....and cut off the chains of sin and death that holds them down. Yet, we do not have to break them ourselves. Only Jesus can! For He defeated Satan on the cross! He also delivered us from the bondage of sin when He died on the cross yet after three days rose again from the dead. So all we can do.....in fact all we have to do.....is unite as a church.....to earnestly pray to God for our loved ones.....for those around us.....and for university students on our campus. Therefore, let's remember Jesus' love for you and me! Let's firmly hold it in our hearts.....and as a church.....let's begin to purposefully pray for others.....just like the Jerusalem Church prayed for Peter. May the Lord deliver countless souls from Satan's clutches as our ministry begins to earnestly pray to God for them!!