

TUESDAY 26 July 2022 "Prison break!" (Acts 12:4-15)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus"

When you think about the power of prayer, I wonder what your experience has been my friends? *Have you ever seen God respond to your prayers, or the prayers of other people in powerful, miraculous, remarkable ways?*

Yesterday I left you in a crisis situation that we find described in Acts 12. It was Passover weekend in Jerusalem, perhaps 12 or 15 years after the famous Passover weekend when Jesus was crucified and rose again. This time King Herod Agrippa I had arrested and ordered the execution of the apostle James, the brother of John and very close friend of Jesus. *He had also imprisoned the apostle Peter and was planning his execution after Passover!* The reason was simple. The rapid growth of the number of people trusting in Jesus and becoming part of this Jesus movement and the geographical spread of this movement to all parts of Israel and even into neighboring Syria and beyond was alarming to the Jewish religious leaders who had repeatedly warned the apostles to stop preaching about Jesus.

Their claim that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and is alive and had ascended back to heaven was essential to their Gospel, but it was anathema to the Pharisees! But this Jesus movement was also alarming to King Herod who was increasingly anxious about the growth momentum and excitement of these people now called "**Christians**", and reports of occasional miracles in Jesus' name. His fear, of course, was that if this Jesus movement became a political force, it could create havoc in Palestine, and he would be removed from his position of influence and authority! Do you see the crisis? It's not unlike many parts of our world today, is it? May I ask an important question... *How is the "Jesus movement" in your part of the world influencing and impacting life there?*

The record says: **"After arresting Peter, King Herod Agrippa I put Peter in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each! Herod intended to bring him out for trial after the Passover....but the church was earnestly praying to God for Peter."** (Acts 12:4,5) Have you ever been in that situation my friends where PRAY was all you felt you could do? *Have you had experiences in your life when God really did answer your desperate prayer in remarkable, maybe even miraculous ways?* We can well imagine the people were not only fearful of King Herod and the Jewish leaders and the Roman soldiers, but 12 or 15 years was a long time since Jesus was gone, and I wonder how long it had been since any of them had seen any demonstration of God's power? Did many of them doubt that God was paying attention to their desperate plight? Did they wonder why God had allowed James to be executed and now Peter imprisoned? *Did some of them begin to suggest God had abandoned them or was no longer interested in them? You know, the same types of wrong thinking which creeps into our hearts even today when life is painful and confusing, and things aren't working out as you want them to?*

Peter's situation was hopeless, desperate. The prison was impenetrable, and Peter was under the guard of 4 squads of 4 soldiers in each squad! I presume that means 6 hour shifts so at all times guards were awake, watching to be sure nothing happens to Peter! What was Peter thinking about during those days? Prisoners in such prisons in the first century often died due to lack of food and water or rat bites or the squalor all around them. Did Peter feel he was being punished by God or had been forgotten by Jesus? Did he feel he was a failure? Did he start praying for death to deliver him out of that dungeon? We have no evidence Peter had any communication with anyone outside that prison, so he had no idea the word had spread and Christians throughout the area were begging Jesus for a miracle! *Can you imagine how desperate the other apostles felt with James executed and Peter in the dungeon likely never to get out?*

The record has remarkable detail: ***"The night before King Herod was to bring Peter to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains and sentries stood guard at the entrance."*** (Acts 12:6) May I ask you friends, WHY do you suppose Dr. Luke gives us such detail about Peter's incarceration? I've learned as I read the Bible to pay attention when such details are given because usually my understanding of God's direct involvement in our world is directly tied to my awareness of the details given. Peter is asleep, but two chains hold him secure in that prison cell, and sentries on their feet standing watch at the cell door make Peter untouchable by anyone wanting to help him. *I've learned God often allows us to be in those types of hopeless situations so that when God does what only God can do to help us, there is no doubt in our minds that God Himself, the Creator of the Universe, has inserted Himself into our hopeless situation!* That's what happened to Peter...

'Suddenly an angel of the LORD appeared, and a light shone in the cell. The angel struck Peter on the side and woke him up. 'Quick, get up' the angel said and the chains fell off Peter's wrists! Then the angel said to Peter, 'Put on your clothes and sandals. Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.' (Acts 12:7,8) Put yourself in that smelly, dark cell. Do you see what is happening? Evidently the angel is causing the soldiers to be in some type of sleep or trance, so they are unaware of what is happening! Peter is stunned, speechless, frozen, unable to move, rubbing his eyes to be sure he's awake but not able to believe what he is seeing or hearing. I imagine the angel had to urge Peter to get moving more than once for he was so shocked; he couldn't think straight! Finally, Peter has gotten to his feet, put on his clothes and is looking around the cell, and seeing both soldiers asleep, Peter can't believe what's happening to him. I imagine the angel grabbed Peter's arm, pulling him toward the cell door.

"Peter followed the angel out of the prison, but he had no idea what was happening was real, Peter thought he was having a vision or a dream. They passed the first and second guards and came to the prison iron gate... it opened for them by itself, and they walked out through the opening. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left Peter!" (Acts 12:9-11) The street is dark and deserted, it's late at night. Peter leaned against a building trying to breathe deeply and clear his head. What's happening here? Who was that angel who

freed him? What should he do now? Surely those guards will awaken and find him gone and immediately start a search for him and if found he would likely not be chained again but killed immediately for trying to escape. Seconds were important now. I'm sure Peter prayed, asking God to give him clear direction. *Where should he go, where would it be safe?*

Evidently within minutes Peter was convinced he was not in a dream or vision, it was real, God had rescued him from prison and so Peter turned the corner heading for one place he felt he would be safe. The record says: **"Peter 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."** (Acts 12:12,13) I wonder if you've ever been so surprised you didn't know what to do? Leaving the door closed for security, Rhoda asked who was at the door and Peter responded. She recognized his voice and was so shocked she ran back to the group... without opening the door! Of course, it couldn't be Peter for he was in Herod's dungeon, chained to guards. Rhoda said to the praying people: **"Peter is at the door!"** Look at them, eyes wide, mouths hanging open. Finally, someone says, **"You're out of your mind!"** May I ask friends, have you ever said that to someone who has claimed a miracle or some special encounter with God? *Must things always be explainable, practical for you? Is there any room in your life experience for the supernatural, for God to reach in and touch you miraculously?*

That's what God was doing here! God was reinvigorating Peter with a miraculous, angel led rescue from Herod's inescapable dungeon. Jesus was coming to this prayer meeting and reawakening their faith in miracles, their excitement about Jesus' constant watching over His People and His power unleashed into their need! The Holy Spirit was refreshing all of them with a newfound excitement about being the people of God at a strategic time and place in history! Let's pause here with Peter still knocking at the door and the prayer meeting stunned... *could it be God is ready to do something spectacular in your city, your church, your life, and are you ready for a powerful touch from God?* Here's a song to help us consider our readiness to recognize and join God in something special, today...

Today's Scripture is Acts 12:4-15.