

WEDNESDAY 27 July 2022 "God Power!" (Acts 12:16-24)

Good morning my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

**Why are we so surprised when God answers our prayer? In fact, are we sometimes so surprised that we look for other explanations rather than actually believing in the miracle of God's direct involvement in our lives and His response to our cries for God's help?** Yesterday we looked at one of the greatest miracles of answered prayer in the Bible. Peter was rescued by an angel sent from God to Herod's dungeon in Jerusalem, where Peter was asleep chained to two guards, while two other guards were standing at the door to his section of the dungeon! Today let's look at how those who were praying for this miracle responded **when suddenly there he was, rescued Peter, standing right in front of them!!** The account is recorded for us in Acts 12.

You'll recall I left you yesterday with rescued Peter standing in the street knocking on the door of the home of Mary where he presumed some of the Jesus followers in Jerusalem were gathered, as they often did, for prayer. A servant girl named Rhoda had come to the door in answer to the knocks, but she didn't open the door. She asked who it was and when Peter answered, she recognized Peter's voice but was so shocked she ran back to the prayer meeting and told them, leaving Peter still standing in the street in the middle of the night.

Acts 12:16 says: **"Peter kept knocking on the door, and when they opened it and saw Peter, they were astonished! Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord Jesus had brought him out of prison."** Have you ever stood outside in the dark knocking on a door waiting for someone to open the door for you? Do you remember seconds of waiting seemed like hours? So, let's stand beside Peter in this frightening moment. I'm sure he kept looking around just waiting for guards to come running from the prison in search of their escaped prisoner. If found, it would mean death for sure!

Finally, the door opened and those inside just stared! It was impossible! *Yes, they could see him, they heard Peter's voice, but their minds simply could not believe his escape was really possible.* I'm sure they finally grabbed him and pulled him inside, closed and bolted the door behind him! Peter didn't wait for their questions... he jumped right into the story. He was sleeping in the dungeon, suddenly someone was shaking him to wake him up and when he opened his eyes it was an angel, and a bright light was illuminating his dark, horrible dungeon cell with two guards sleeping chained to him! Then Peter continued and I'm sure those listening hardly breathed, amazed at every detail that Peter gave them! Perhaps it was Mary, since this was her home, who said, *'Come Peter, let us give you something to eat, and then we need you to tell the whole story to all who are gathered in my home. We've been praying earnestly for you, begging God to somehow come to your aide in prison.'*

Oh my, some real home cooked food sure sounded good to Peter. Maybe even a bath... *but there was no time to waste. He was a wanted man, and he needed to leave Jerusalem quickly and find someplace to hide!* So instead, Peter said to them, **"...Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,' and Peter then left for another place."** (Acts 12:17)

Now maybe you are thinking, *'but wait a minute, Luke tells us in Acts 12:2 that James, the brother of John, was executed by Herod. Did Peter not know about this, or is this another James?'* Thank you for asking my friends, *this James is actually James the 1/2 brother of Jesus.* That means Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also the mother of this James, and Joseph her husband was James' father. Jesus was therefore an older brother to this James. BUT the Gospel accounts tell us NONE of Jesus' 1/2 brothers or sisters believed Jesus was the Messiah or the Son of God while he was alive. (John 7:5) This is the first mention of James the brother of Jesus and clearly by now James not only had believed in Jesus but was a leader of the Jesus movement in Jerusalem! *In fact, my friends, did you know this is the same James who wrote the little New Testament book which bears his name?*

So off into the darkness of the night ran rescued Peter. We don't know where he went. But I've often wondered if he went to Bethany, about 2 or 3 miles over the Mount of Olives hills, east of Jerusalem, and stayed at the home of Lazarus and his two sisters Mary and Martha. Remember them and how often Jesus and His disciples stopped there for a meal and overnight in their travels? Oh, what a story Peter would have had to tell them when he arrived in Bethany! What we do know is what happened the next day at the prison. The record tells us: **"In the morning there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter! After King Herod had a thorough search made for Peter and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed!"** (Acts 12:18,19)

Oh my! Now that tells us how paranoid Herod was, just like his father and grandfather, but it also tells us how terrified Herod and other leaders were for the potential of the miraculous power of God in this Jesus movement! May I ask you my friends: *what is your sense of the power of God in the Jesus movement in your city?* Is there any awareness of such God power where you live? How is it seen? Please notice the remaining 4 verses of Acts 12 give us yet another evidence of the tremendous power of God unleashed. Be careful as you read it, it may frighten you!

King Herod evidently was so stunned by this Peter escape, he needed to leave Jerusalem and take a trip perhaps to clear his mind, for he had no logical explanation for Peter's escape! So, King Herod headed for Caesarea, remember that city? That's where Cornelius and the Italian regiment was stationed, and you'll recall what happened when Peter had brought the Gospel there to Cornelius' home. (Acts 10) I doubt King Herod knew anything about that, nor did he know that Philip the Deacon had moved there with his family, and he was preaching about Jesus. (Acts 8:40) *So in some sense, King Herod went from the frying pan into the fire!* Have you heard that old adage?

The record tells us he'd been having a feud with people in that region, and they sought an audience with King Herod since they depended on food supplies from his region which evidently, he had been restricting. But what King Herod didn't know was that God was about to show Herod a whole new level of God's power.

The record says: ***"On the appointed day King Herod, wearing his royal robes, 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 struck Herod down and he was eaten by worms and died!"*** (Acts 12:21-23) Now that, my friends, is God power! What gruesome picture just came into my mind as I imagine this happening right in front of my eyes, what about you? While Luke does not give us any evidence that the angel said anything, I wonder how did the people know WHY Herod suddenly was struck dead, and did they actually SEE an angel strike Herod down? I presume the answer is yes to both questions, because I presume God would want the people to understand what was happening in this shocking, remarkable experience. For any Jews in the audience that day, I presume immediately into their minds would have come this powerful warning from God written nearly 700 years before by their prophet Isaiah: ***"I am the LORD, that is my Name! I will not yield My glory to another or My praise to idols."*** (Isaiah 42:8)

The apostles and deacons had been very careful whenever God did a miracle that involved them in any way, to make sure they proclaimed clearly and often that this was NOT their miraculous power, but rather the power of God and to give God all the glory. Remember how that happened with Peter and the cripple at the Temple gate? (Acts 3) Once again Dr. Luke gives us a brief summary statement of how the people of that region of the world responded to the dual miracles of Peter's angel assisted deliverance from Herod's dungeon, and here an angel's judgment upon Herod. Luke writes: ***"The word of God continued to spread and flourish."*** (Acts 12:24)

That phrase, ***'The word of God'*** was the story of Jesus, the Gospel, and the truths Jesus taught. The Gospel was spreading like a wildfire all across the Palestine region of the Roman Empire and such miracles were like fresh wind on a brush fire. ***The blaze of the Holy Spirit's work spread from town to town and thousands of lives were changed as they trusted in the truth of Jesus!*** So, let's pause right here... what strikes you about these two dramatic examples of God's power in Acts 12? ***And what do people know about the power of God in your part of the world?*** What about YOU?

Here's a song to help you consider God's power. . .

**Today's Scripture is Acts 12:16-24.**