

## And the Church Prayed

By: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: Acts 12

Would you please turn with me to the Acts of the Apostles chapter 12 and I just want to preface our reading by saying that we have two bookends in this chapter and one major part right there in the middle and the bookends happen to focus on two people—James in the first couple of verses and Herod in the last couple of verses and also we see in these two bookends that both of them die. But in the middle is a solid chunk of scripture from which we can learn and glean so many beautiful nuggets that we can apply in our lives. As I read it I am going to point out to you six verses that I think bears our consideration but we'll look at it almost fleetingly. Then I want us to come back to one verse that I think God wants us to spend time on.

Acts chapter 12 reading from verse 1

“Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.”

I want you to pay attention to this verse 5 the first point ...

“So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.”

On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, “Get up quickly.” And his chains fell off his hands.”

Verse 8 and I want you to see the second point...

And the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and put on your sandals.” And he did so. And he said to him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.” And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the Iron Gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by

itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. When Peter came to himself, he said,”

And this is the third point...

““Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.” And when he realized *this*, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter’s voice,”

And this is number four...

“Because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.”

Fifth point...

“They said to her, “You are out of your mind!” But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, “It is his angel.” But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened *the door*, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said,

This is number six...

““Report these things to James and the brethren.” Then he left and went to another place. Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers *as to* what could have become of Peter. When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away *to execution*. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.”

This is the ending bracket, verse twenty...

“Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king’s chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king’s country. On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and *began* delivering an address to them. The people kept crying out, “The voice of a god and not of a man!”<sup>23</sup> And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with *them* John, who was also called Mark.”

Heavenly Father, would you give us just more of your Spirit, to help us to understand this passage and then Lord, to just invite how we need to understand it in our own frameworks and if there are any changes that we need to make in our lives, we yield to you at this time, praying this prayer in the name of Your son, Jesus. Amen.

The first verse starts out by saying, “now about that time.” What was the time, because if we go back in Acts you will see that about five chapters before this again He starts by saying, about that time. Well this is the time that we see that Stephen is doing great and mighty things under the power and authority of the Holy Spirit then we see in verse seven that he gives this long sermon and it ends with his martyrdom then great persecution then comes upon the church and there is a scattering or a Diaspora of all the believers that we see in chapter eight.

The persecution increases. Saul is the one who is spearheading it. He is zealously thinking that this is the right thing to do and then we read in chapter nine how he is saved.

In chapter ten we see how the gentiles then begin to receive the good news and how Peter goes out and meets with Cornelius and all of that happens and then in verse 11 the people at Jerusalem, the church in Jerusalem calls people back and says please explain to us what’s happening we hear that the gentiles are being saved as well and so Peter explains the position that he was in when he was out. That’s what happens before this particular chapter.

Then we come to chapter 12:1-2 and we see that the persecution now goes towards the disciples and those who were associated with Jesus and the first person to go is James.

Remember Jesus referred to them as the Sons of Thunder. James would become the first one of the disciples to be killed. But here’s the thing – up until the time that James died I would think that the disciples had a kind of a faith that in that they trusted God to work on their behalf as they did their work. I say that without wanting you to analyze that too much because if we were reading the fourth chapter Peter and John if you remember healed a crippled man and then they were put in prison but the next day they were released. So their lives were okay and then we read how all the disciples were going around preaching and so they all were put in prison and then an angel came and led them out until James. I think to myself if I was there I would have thought okay this is how it is going to be that as we do what we are supposed to do we go into prison and

then God gets us out of prison and then we continue to do it. It ended with James. Suddenly, that was not the plan anymore. James was killed and Herod even thought I'm going to get Peter because the Jews seemed to like this.

Remember, the Jews were the ones also who were trying to crush the Christians and he gets Peter and he's thinking I'll let the Passover go because it pleases the people then I'll deal with Peter as well and it's in this context that he is seized and we read that he was chained to two Roman guards and then he had two other guards who were standing by the cell door to prevent him from escaping.

Then in verse 5 we see, "So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God."

If we look at that line by itself and if we can turn it to ourselves we may be able to say, that that's not the way we might have behaved in this situation because often when we ask God for something and something else happens the first thing that goes out of our lives is prayer. Because there's disappointment, rejection, God didn't hear my prayer, I'm going to stop praying or God knows what I need so if He wants to do it let Him do it. That becomes our attitude and yet when we look at the church, they weren't disappointed, they weren't dejected but they came back stronger they came back saying, now we've got to pray. Not just pray but pray fervently for the things of God. We need to pray with a certain amount of fervor, tenacity with persistence for God to work in our behalf. That's what they did.

Then we move on and we see in verse 7 an angel comes and wakes up Peter and what's remarkable is that Peter manages to sleep throughout this. I don't know how much peace you would have had if you were in prison and expecting your life to be taken as soon as the Passover is over that you can have a good night of rest. Peter seemed to be in deep sleep because the angel came and said: "wake up, wake up!" But here's what again grabbed my attention, the angels said to him "gird yourself and put on your sandals," and he did so, and he said to him "wrap your cloak around you and follow me."

Often when we think about God we think about His power, we think about how awesome He is. How holy His salvific power is and all of those things that have to do with that. We very rarely think of His kindness. We very rarely think that He is a tender person that He cares deeply for little things that even the small things matter to Him as it did for Peter. Because here's the angel under instruction of course from God who not only wakes him up but then says, "put on your clothes, put on your sandals." Peter doesn't know what is happening and then "wrap the cloak around you" all of this to make sure that when Peter stepped out of the prison he would be well clothed. He would have sandals on his feet to walk away from the prison. I wonder whether you deal

with God's kindness in your life. Do you see the ways in which He kind of draws you to Himself, gives you the things that you ask, takes care of little things. Sometimes, we think it is only the big things in life that God is bothered about, isn't it? But He gives us small things as well.

If you look back at the gospels when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter, he picked her up took her hand and then He brought her back to life and what was the first thing that He said after he brought he back to life, He said, "make sure that she eats something." I thought that is so nice! That we have a God who cares about these things, He knew that that's what she needed and He said make sure that she is fed and while we place a large store on a lot of His attributes that we just mentioned I want you to even begin thinking about the kind of God who is caring—one who is tender hearted and loving and to be able to experience that as well.

3. We see in verse 11 "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod." Now I know for sure! Often we look for other reasons than God, when things happen in our lives. We are praying for healing and when it happens we say one of those tablets that I took were really, really effective. I am not dishing tablets; I know that God works through tablets as well. Or we experience something that God has done and we say, yes, anyway it was going to happen like that or even worse, "Well, I took care of it." We forget to give God the glory. If you read scripture especially, Isaiah you will see how careful God is about His glory. Twice in Isaiah in 42:8 and 48:11 He says, "My glory I will not give to another." And we see what happened to Herod at the end of this chapter. He didn't give God the glory and he died. The people began crying out, "the voice of a God and not of a man" and immediately an angel of the Lord came and struck Him because he did not give God the glory and he was eaten by worms and died. We need to be very careful that when we ask God to work in our lives, to do something, that we also give Him the glory for what has happened.

Next when she recognized Peter's voice, i.e. Rodha, the servant girl who was working there because of her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. I think the Holy Spirit had a little bit of a smile when He put that in. here's, Peter the church is praying for him to come out, that he'll be released and all of that and then he lands up at the front gate and he's knocking at the door and Rodha comes in and says "Wow! Its Peter and then she runs in and then she goes away an Peter's saying, "open the door, let me in and it made me think about that, it made me think about the things that give us joy. Are we joyful or overjoyed at the things that happen to others? The bible says, she was just filled with joy that she forgot to do what she should have done, but joy enveloped her. Let me push that a little bit, how do people who work for us respond when something good happens to us. Are they filled with joy? Or are they resentful because they don't have a good relationship with

you. Do we treat them as do your job and go? Or do they, when something good has happened to you, clap their hands and say that's lovely. That's wonderful! Maybe, that's the kind of relationship that we ought to have, that we have to be filled with joy when good things happen to people.

Then in verse 15 when she came and told them Peter is standing outside they said you're out of your mind. Then followed it up with, it must be his angel. How often beloved, do we pray for lunch and expect the result? Do we really believe that God is going to answer that prayer, do we really believe it or has it just become a prayer of rote that we say I've got to pray about this and so we pray and not expect that God would answer it.

I remember reading some years back about a story of three men who were living in a place where there had been no rain—parched arid place and one day they decided that they would go out into the dry fields and pray for rain so the next day morning they all got up and they set off to this place to pray but only one of them took an umbrella with him. Sometimes we are like that isn't it? We pray for rain but we don't believe it's going to rain. We don't make the necessary changes in faith that will happen when God answers our prayers. Maybe, even as I speak about it, some of you have thrown out a prayer request that you've been praying for some time. They are saying yes, I'll just keep praying but I don't think it's going to happen and part of our night prayer or morning prayer has just this what we just go through it. Not really thinking it's going to happen.

Then in verse 17 when he finally let in, he says report these things to James and the brethren. The good things that God does needs to be made known beloved to the leaders, to the pastor, we need to be able to let the people know what God has done in your life. It would be a terrible thing if you experienced something wonderful that God has done and we don't share it so that others may be encouraged by it.

We have this grateful wall of CAP just to help you do that to say, look what the Lord has done. He's done a wonderful thing and I want to put it out there and say, this is what God has done so that others who read, read and be encouraged and inspired that God is still in the business of answering prayers.

Having looked at these six areas and I want to add a couple of things to what I just said the way to overcome Satan, to defeat Satan.

Revelation tells us in 12:11 “and they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony,” testimonies are so important within the church. In fact, I was thinking that for November's bulletin we are going to have page or pages of testimonies that God has done in your lives and God has touched you. If you

want to give praise for what God has done send in a note to us at the office and I don't care how many pages we will have to print, we'll print it and put it into the bulletin.

Let it be an encouragement to the rest of the church that God is still working and doing things so in the next four five days, the bulletin comes out next week and we close it by about Friday, so write in a testimony if you have one and we'll print it.

But as I said these were the six things that just popped out and I thought I should give it to you but the place that I really want us to land on is in verse 5. "So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God." Prayer to him was made for him fervently by the church to God.

1. It begs the question at least as I read it and I try to apply it to our situation whether prayer is being offered in our church.
2. Whether it is fervent prayer that is being raised up to the Lord here at CAP.

Are we praying as a church? I know that in our congregation there are so many needs, needs enough for us to be getting on our knees and praying fervently to God. I know that in our congregation we have somebody who is down to 30% of a kidney, it's been deteriorating over the years and all this person has is 30%. I know in our congregation we have somebody whose body is producing blood more than is required and it's a huge problem, how to deal with the excess blood. I know in our congregation that we have people dealing with fragile relationships, struggling to just keep the family together. I know in our congregation we have people who are in debt and who look at the amount of debt and look at the amount they are getting in monthly and know that is not going to happen. These are just a few church and there are much, much more.

The question that I am asking is, are we as a church praying fervently for these requests? Are we praying at all? If we look at scripture, the church got together and I love the fact that all of you have a prayer life. I am talking about the church getting together and praying and the synergy and the power that is created by coming together. Are we a praying church? Or have we just stagnated, we come here we are happy we meet our friends, we love the worship team they do a great job and then we go on. Are we sensing God's power in our midst? Are you? Is there enough prayer going out that opens the heavens and says God is here in our midst? Are we praying fervently for those needs within the congregation? We must isn't it church or else we are just playing games; it is just a charade isn't it? We come here we do our thing, but we don't really expect anything from God and God comes when His power fills the church and we grow as His disciples. Are we growing? Can you say I am deeper into being a disciple today as I was last month or the last six months, or a year or five years? Are we meeting and praying for that to happen in the church?

I send out emails to you about prayer on Wednesdays asking you to get involved with prayer giving you things to pray about and I am so glad for those of you who respond and I'm just encouraged when they come back to me. Some of you ask why I have to send it back to you. I'll tell you why? Somebody said that Satan is not bothered with our programs, he's not bothered with the various other things that we may do, and the thing that makes him tremble is when the church prays. That makes him tremble. Why do you need to respond because Satan is not omniscient? Do you know that? Satan is not omniscient; he cannot read your mind. The only one who is omniscient is God. Therefore, in your mind if you are determined that you are going to pray, he doesn't know about it. So I ask just simply to respond. When you respond it's out in the open, it's part of history known revealed history and when he sees that kind of prayer rising then he trembles.

I send out letters to over 300 of you and do you know how many respond to that? The average that I get back every week is between 55 and 60. It's 20% of the church, that's not a praying church beloved, not by any stretch of imagination. Why would we not want to invite God's presence and power into our midst? Why would we not want that?

"Prayer for him was being made fervently, to God." We ought to be praying isn't it church and if that's the number of people praying we are stagnating, we are not growing. Not growing at all. We've come to a comfortable place where we say this is good. I'm fine, I'll just come in, I'll be present, sometimes I won't be present, I determine, I'll just go out somewhere. There used to be a time here at CAP where we had people who would be out and then come back on Saturday or early Sunday morning because they didn't want to miss church. Do we have that kind of zeal, that kind of presence that we cannot sit at home on a Sunday; I've got to be in church, that our heart breaks for people in the congregation who are going through difficult times. Is it okay to not do anything? Should we not, church?

Are you with me? I know that this is the kind of sermon that can empty a church, I'm okay with that. I really am because the church which is the true church is one that is a praying church, my house shall be called a house of prayer and if it's not a house of prayer then it's a club like the Rotary Club or the Lions Club we meet at Powai as well, and I would hate to be a Pastor of a club. We have needs beloved that we need to take up as a church, praying fervently.

I'm saying this Wednesday for those of you who can come and just say as a church I am coming from 6:30 to 8:00 pm we'll pray. We'll sit here and pray for needs that are in the church. Through Wednesday I'll send you the mail. Pick a slot and pray. Maybe, you can't make it here on Wednesday from 6:30 to 8:00 and then at 10 O'clock let's do another thing, I'll send you a message that can have a bridge and you can dial into that bridge and we can pray together on that bridge from 10:00 to 11:00 O'clock. Whatever,



it takes for us to come together and say we are intentional about being true disciples of Jesus we will do. Let's do that church, let's not settle to the point where we're complacent because that's the end of the church.

It's interesting when Jesus said in Matthew 7:7 "keep asking and it will be given to you, keep searching and you will find, keep knocking and the door will be opened to you." The "You" in that passage is plural; it's not singular, talking to many. The church should be asking, seeking and knocking together, and then we will see His power, church. You won't be able to recognize the Church at Powai because God's power will be so evident not only in the things that he is doing in our lives but as a community of faith and that's what we ought to be about that we pray fervently as a church. I'll quit, but I want to read a poem for you that Oswald Smith wrote, he says,

"God promised He would answer pray,  
Well then His promises plead.  
And come to Him in Jesus' name,  
He lives to intercede.

Behold Him at God's right hand,  
Our Saviour, Christ the Lord,  
Oh trust Him in the darkest night,  
Rely upon His Word.

Our every need He will supply,  
He hears us when we pray.  
Oh let us then our faith renew,  
And trust in God today.

It matters not how great the test,  
God always makes a way.  
Then let us take Him at His Word,  
He will not say us nay.

The hills before His presence melt,  
The mountains disappear.  
He answers prayer in Jesus' name,  
Our cry He'll sure hear.

May the Lord add what He wants to add to this Word and apply it to our hearts this morning.

Will you pray with me?

Our heavenly Father, we are so sorry this morning that we have become ones who are complacent about communicating with you. Lord, there are possibly very few times when we pray fervently and persistently or tenaciously for the things that are upon your heart to do in our midst. Forgive us for being absent but Lord, this morning I pray for each and every person here that you would stir within our hearts the desire for prayer, Lord to put away the excuses of comfort and be uncomfortable Lord, for you, we pray Lord that you would stir us towards praying for needs, that you would show us through your Spirit what those needs are and that each week Master we will grow deeper and deeper in love with you and that our hearts would be tuned Lord, to not only seek Your will but to do it. Lord Jesus in Your name and for your dear sake we pray these things. Amen.