

"SUPERnatural"

"PRAYER (along with all the 'spiritual' disciplines) our Personal Interface with God"

Week 2 - Acts 12:1-19

Intro---CHEECH & CHACHI VIDEO ON PRAYER---

(35)

ACTS 12:1-19...

¹ About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. ² He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. ³ When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.) ⁴ Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover. ⁵ But while Peter was in prison, **the church prayed very earnestly for him.**

⁶ The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate. ⁷ Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. ⁸ Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered.

⁹ So Peter left the cell, following the angel. **But all the time he thought it was a vision.** He didn't realize it was actually happening. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him.

¹¹ **Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!"** he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"

¹² When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. ¹³ He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named **Rhoda** came to open it. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!"

¹⁵ **"You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel."**

¹⁶ Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When **they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed.** ¹⁷ He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers what happened," he said. And then he went to another place.

¹⁸ At dawn there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter. ¹⁹ Herod Agrippa ordered a thorough search for him. When he couldn't be found, Herod interrogated the guards and sentenced them to death. Afterward Herod left Judea to stay in Caesarea for a while.

PRAYER CHANGES THINGS...It Just Not What You Think It Is!

1) Why did the early church pray?...why "earnestly"?

2) Why did it take Peter, and the ones praying so long to realize their prayer had, in fact, been answered in the way they had hoped?

3) How can we, as individuals and as a church, pray in this way?

There are hundreds of passages in which prayer is given &/or discussed. Today---our time only allows us for a few of those passages. And today, I was drawn to go straight to Jesus on the topic!

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Jesus ON Prayer...

Matthew chapters 6 (Sermon on the Mount)

6:

⁷ “When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. ⁸ Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! ⁹ Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be kept holy.

¹⁰ **May your Kingdom come soon.**

May your will be done on earth,

as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today the food we need,

¹² and forgive us our sins,

as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

¹³ And don’t let us yield to temptation,

but rescue us from the evil one....

7:

... ⁷ “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹ “You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? ¹⁰ Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! ¹¹ So if you sinful people know how to **give good gifts** to your children, how much more will **your heavenly Father give good gifts** to those who ask him.

John 15:7

⁷ **But if you remain in me** and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!

Matthew 17

¹⁴ At the foot of the mountain, a large crowd was waiting for them. A man came and knelt before Jesus and said, ¹⁵ “Lord, have mercy on my son. He has seizures and suffers terribly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. ¹⁶ So I brought him to your disciples, but they couldn’t heal him.”

¹⁷ Jesus said, “**You faithless and corrupt people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.**” ¹⁸ Then Jesus rebuked the demon in the boy, and it left him. From that moment the boy was well.

¹⁹ Afterward the disciples asked Jesus privately, “Why couldn’t we cast out that demon?”

²⁰ “**You don’t have enough faith,**” Jesus told them. “**I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.**”

NOTICE---

---HE'S GOD...YOU'RE NOT (it's all about HIM!)

---HE'S A GOOD GOD (what Father would give you a stone?)

---HE'S A GREAT GOD (mustard seeds can move mountains if God is behind them!)

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Jesus IN Prayer...

The Night before the Cross...

Matthew 26...

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, "Sit here while I go over there to pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed.

³⁸ He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁹ He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "**My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.**"

⁴⁰ Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you watch with me even one hour? ⁴¹ Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!"

⁴² Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, "**My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.**" ⁴³ When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn't keep their eyes open.

⁴⁴ So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again.

&

John 17...

¹⁵ I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.

²⁰ "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

²² "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³ I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. ²⁴ Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. **Then they can see all the glory you gave me** because you loved me even before the world began!

NOTICE...

---It's all about HIS WILL! --- His prayer is about His Father's will...not His own!!!! If Jesus prayed this way?...How should we?

---It's all about HIS GLORY! --- Even His prayers for us are ultimately about His glory!!!!

---And---given how much He loves us...given how much grace He drenches us with...given how much He has freed us from...given WHO HE IS...WHY would we want to pray any other way or pray for any other reason?

(5)

AS WE CONSIDER OUR NEXT STEP...OUR SQUARE ONE. You see it's not whether or not we are supposed to pray or whether or not prayer is a miraculous conduit for miracles...THOSE ARE GIVEN'S!

Likewise, its not about whether or not HE'S LISTENING...HE CARES when we pray...the real question for all of us to ponder is, ARE WE LISTENING when we pray? Do we, as He constantly answers our prayers (whether we like the answer or not)...open the door to let it in to our lives or do we, like Rhoda, leave the answer standing outside ;0)

http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/videos-for-pastors/149544-god-is-listening-are-you.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Daily-Update

SQUARE ONE--- VIDEO CLOSE OUT---PROGRESSION OF PRAYER IN OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS BY GRANGER

DIVE DEEPER...

Additional Scriptures and Commentary for those who want to go deeper!

NOTICE how BOTH in the Old and New Testaments answered prayers were tied to hearts that were synced with/for God, not ourselves!

Matthew 6:33

³³ **Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.**

JOHN 15:7

⁷ **But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!**

James 4:13-15

13 Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." 14 How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog--it's here a little while, then it's gone. 15 What you ought to say is, "**If the Lord wants us to**, we will live and do this or that."

Psalms 37:4

⁴ **Take delight in the LORD,**
and he will give you your heart's desires.

Proverbs 16:3

³ **Commit your actions to the LORD,**
and your plans will succeed.

Curiously, except with the possible exception of how you interpret & apply the relatively small prayer of Jabez...prayer is never used as a heavenly avenue for self-enrichment or to gain things for self outside of those things that can be used for the Kingdom.

As always---our deep appreciation to David Guzik and his web-site, Enduringword.com for the use of what is easily one of the most comprehensive yet insightful commentaries anyone can find online, or for that matter, in print. N.T. Write and Ben Witherington III are also to be thanked for their extensive academic research and spiritual insights found in "Acts for Everyone Part 1/Part 2" and "Acts: A Socio Rhetorical Commentary".

From Enduringword.com...

A. James the apostle dies as a martyr.

1. (1) Herod harasses the church.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church.

a. **Herod the king:** This is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled in the days of Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:1-16). Herod Agrippa I was also the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had a role in the trial of Jesus (Luke 23:7-12).

b. **Stretched out his hand to harass some from the church:** No doubt, this was done because it was politically popular for Herod. It pleased many of his citizens who didn't like Christians. Many political figures are ready to persecute Christians if it will make them politically popular.

2. (2) The death of the apostle James.

Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

a. **Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword:** This is a new development in the history of the church. James is the first of the twelve who followed Jesus to be martyred.

b. Up to Acts 12, the church has been on a "hot streak," experiencing one exciting conversion after another. First there was Saul of Tarsus, then the Gentile centurion Cornelius, then the mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles in Antioch. But in Acts 12, the ugly opposition inspired by Satan again raises its head.

c. James is certainly not the first *Christian* to die in faithfulness to Jesus. Stephen (Acts 7:58-60) was martyred before this, and certainly others were also. But the death of James shattered the illusion that somehow, the twelve enjoyed a unique Divine protection.

d. **James the brother of John,** in particular, might have thought to have been "protected." He was one of the special intimates of Jesus, often mentioned with his brother John and with Peter (Matthew 17:1, 26:37, Mark 5:37, 9:2, 14:33; Luke 5:37, 9:2, and 14:33).

i. But Jesus promised no special protection for even His closest followers; He warned them to be ready for persecution (Matthew 10:16-26).

ii. In Mark 10:35-40, John and his brother James came to Jesus and asked to be considered His two chief lieutenants. Jesus replied to them, *You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?* James and John, not really knowing what they were saying, replied by saying they could. Jesus promised them, *You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized.* This martyrdom was the fulfillment of that promise for James. John fulfilled it by a lifetime of devoted service to God despite repeated attempts to martyr him.

e. Normally, **with the sword** means that James was beheaded.

i. Eusebius relates a story from Clement of Alexandria, who says that the soldier who guarded James before the judge was so affected by his witness that he declared himself a Christian also and was willingly executed for Jesus along side of James (Eusebius, *Church History* 2.9.2-3).

f. Significantly, there was no attempt to "replace" James, as there was to replace Judas (Acts 1). This was because James died as a faithful martyr, but Judas revealed his apostasy in betraying Jesus. There was no need for another man to take the office of James.

B. The release of Peter from prison.

1. (3-4) Herod imprisons Peter.

And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

a. **Because he saw that it pleased the Jews:** Seeing his approval ratings rise in the polls when he kills James, Herod seeks to improve his ratings even more when **he proceeded further to Peter also.**

i. There was a significant difference between the persecution from Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:1-3) and from Herod. Saul, wrong as he was, persecuted out of sincere (though misguided) religious conviction, Herod persecuted out of purely political motives.

b. **Intending to bring him before the people after Passover:** Herod will deal with Peter at a politically opportune time, fearing an unpredictable mob reaction when Passover pilgrims flood Jerusalem.

i. Horton suggests three reasons for the delay in executing Peter: (1) Herod wanted to show how scrupulously he observed the Passover; (2) he wanted to wait until the pilgrim crowds went home, fearing a riot; (3) he wanted to wait until he had the full attention of the Jewish population.

c. **Delivered him to four squads of soldiers:** Knowing Peter (with the other apostles) had mysteriously escaped from prison before (Acts 5:17-21), Herod assigns a high-security detail to guard Peter.

i. "Normally it was considered enough for a prisoner to be handcuffed to one soldier, but as a special precaution Peter had a soldier each side of him and both his wrists were manacled" (Stott)

2. (5) The church prays for Peter.

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

a. **Prayer was offered to God for him by the church:** Herod has his soldiers and his prisons; but the church has the power of prayer. The outcome will be decided easily!

b. **Constant prayer was offered to God for him:** The word **constant** also has the idea of *earnest*; literally, the word pictures someone *stretching out all they can for something*. "The verb *ektenos* is related to *ektenes*, a medical term describing the stretching of a muscle to its limits." (MacArthur)

- i. Luke uses this same word *ektenos* for the agonizing prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44).
- ii. Much of our prayer is powerless because it lacks earnestness. Too often we almost pray with the attitude of wanting God to care about things we really don't care too much about.
- iii. *Earnest* prayer has power not because it in itself persuades a reluctant God. Instead, it demonstrates that our heart cares passionately about the things God cares about, fulfilling Jesus' promise *If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you* (John 15:7).

c. **Constant prayer was offered to God:** It is also important to see that the church prayed **to God**. It may seem obvious, but often our prayers are weak because we are not consciously coming into the presence of our great and holy God, offering our requests to Him.

d. When every other gate is shut and locked, the gate to heaven is wide open. We must take advantage of that open gate through prayer!

3. (6-11) God sends an angel to free Peter from prison.

And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off *his* hands. Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me." So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people."

a. The chains, the guards, the prison doors mean nothing to God and His appointed messengers; Peter is instantly set free.

b. **That night Peter was sleeping:** Peter shows no signs of anxiety. He is able to sleep soundly on what seemed to be the last night before his execution. Remember, *He gives His beloved sleep* (Psalm 127:2).

c. **Did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision:**

Peter obeyed without really knowing what was happening. He knew enough to sense that God was doing something and the explanation could come later.

d. **They came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord:** The soldiers, the chains, the guard posts, the iron gate - are all nothing when God is with us and prayer is behind us. Many of us are worrying about the **iron gate** before we ever get to it. A month before hand, and we are anxious about the **iron gate!** But God will take care of it when we come to it.

e. F.F. Bruce relates the story of Sundar Singh, a Tibetan Christian who was likewise freed miraculously from a prison. For his preaching of the gospel, he was thrown into a well, and a cover was put over it and securely locked. He would be left in the well until he died, and he could see the bones and rotting corpses of those who had already perished in their. On the third night of his imprisonment, he heard someone unlocking the cover of the well and removing it. A voice told him to take hold of the rope that was being lowered. Sundar was grateful that the rope had a loop he could put his foot in, because he had injured his arm in the fall down into the well. He was raised up, and the cover was replaced and locked, but when he looked to thank his rescuer he could find no one. When morning came, he went back to the same place he was arrested and started preaching again. News of the preaching came to the official who had him arrested, and Sundar was brought before him again. When the official said someone must have gotten the key and released him, they searched for the key - and found it on the official's own belt. God is still writing the Book of Acts!

f. **And has delivered me from the hand of Herod:** Why did James die and Peter find deliverance? God alone knows; we know though, that James, having graduated to glory, did not consider himself a loser in any way!

- i. Simply, it wasn't time for Peter to go home yet. Until it was time, he was invulnerable. He couldn't be harmed. It was time for James; it was not time for Peter.

4. (12-17) Peter presents himself to the believers that prayed for him.

So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

a. This brief account is so natural, so true to life. Passages like this display the completely historical character of the Book of Acts.

b. **Because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate:** Rhoda is so excited to hear from Peter that she leaves him out at the gate!

c. **But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!"** We are comforted (and amused) by the little faith of these Christians. Even while they are praying for Peter, they find it hard to believe God actually answered their prayer.

- i. Their prayer was earnest, but their faith was not overwhelming. Little faith can accomplish great things if it is placed in the great God.

d. **It is his angel:** The Jews believed in the idea of “guardian angels,” and it seems that they may have believed that one’s guardian angel bore some kind of resemblance to the human it was assigned to.

e. **Go, tell these things to James and the brethren:** The **James** that Peter tells others to report to is not the James who was just martyred. It is probably James, the brother of Jesus, who was a prominent figure in the church at Jerusalem.

f. **And he departed and went to another place:** Except for a brief mention in chapter 15, this is the last Luke speaks of Peter. We know that Peter later met Paul in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14), and later he wrote his two letters.

5. (18-19) The execution of the soldiers who guarded Peter.

Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.

a. **No small stir** is one of the great understatements of the Bible; Herod was furious that his prized prisoner had escaped.

b. **He examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death:** The execution of the guards was customary; in that day, if a guard’s prisoner escaped, the guard was given the penalty due to the prisoner - in this case, death.

RE-CAP OF ENTIRE “GREAT ADVENTURE SERIES” THEMES...

“The Great Adventure” So Far...

Fall '09 –Season 1 –

“EVERYTHING Changes” – It’s all about learning of, living out and leading others to Jesus & the best possible way of life in His Kingdom.

Spring '10 -Season 2 –

“WHATEVER it Takes” – Living in the Kingdom requires that we understand that all we have, all we are & all we hope to be must be surrendered to further His Kingdom.

Fall '10 –Season 3 –

“EVERYONE’S Invited” – The Kingdom invites everyone who would but surrender their trust solely in Jesus for their righteousness and ability to enjoy eternal, abundant life vs reliance on one’s ethnicity, religious affiliation &/or personal accomplishments.