

Peter Is Released From Prison

Acts 12:1-19

MEMORY VERSE

ACTS 12:11

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."

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Three 1"x 8.5" pieces of construction paper per child, whole construction paper sheets, pencils, crayons or markers, scissors, and glue.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

Question and Answer

Tell the children you want to ask them some questions. Ask individual children simple questions such as "What is your name? What day is it? Does Pastor Bob wear silly ties?" Gradually switch to more difficult questions like, "What is gasoline made of? What is 23 divided by 3? What is the square root of pi?"

When the children begin to be unable to answer your questions let them know that God always answers our prayers; we can never ask Him a question that is too hard for Him. The answer to all of our problems is to take them to the almighty God of the Universe.

LESSON TIME!

In today's lesson we will learn about two important elements of the early church: persecution and prayer. The story of Peter's miraculous release from prison will teach us about both. **When we are persecuted, we must pray.**

ACTS 12:1

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

Our story begins with the mention of a king named Herod. Herod Agrippa 1 was the grandson of Herod the Great, who ordered the young boys of Bethlehem to be murdered, and the nephew of Herod Antipas who had John the Baptist beheaded. So this Herod came from a family of people who persecuted the believers of Jesus.

Herod was also a friend of the Jews. He wanted to keep the Jews happy so he would have peace in his little kingdom. The Jews did not like the Christians, so when Herod persecuted the Christians it made the Jews happy, making Herod's life easier.

ACTS 12:2

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

To please the Jews, Herod had James (the brother of John) put to death. Before we point the finger at Herod we might be guilty of the same kind of sin ourselves. Have you ever done something to someone else to make things better for yourself? Have you ever blamed your brother or sister for something you did so they would get punished and not you? Have you ever made fun of someone or picked on him or her so you could be more popular with your friends?

Being mean to someone because you do not like him or her is at the heart of persecution. Satan does not like us because Jesus is our Savior and friend, and he hates Jesus. Satan persecutes the church by tempting man to make the church suffer. By killing James, one of the disciples of Jesus, Herod was being used of Satan to persecute the church. James was an important part of the early church and his death was a tough loss.

Have you ever persecuted someone? Have you ever been persecuted? What is the difference between being persecuted and persecuting someone else? **When we are persecuted, we must pray.**

ACTS 12:3-5a

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 apprehended 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. Peter was therefore kept in prison...

If killing James made the Jews happy, then killing Peter would make them sing the praises of Herod. At least this was the thought of Herod. Herod had Peter put in prison. Peter had been in prison before. The last time he was in prison he had escaped.

Herod wanted to make sure the same thing did not happen again. He appointed sixteen personal guards to watch Peter day and night. Two guards were chained to Peter at all times, and two more were watching the door to his cell. At the end of the feast of unleavened bread Herod planed to put Peter to death. The situation looked hopeless; for Peter to escape would be humanly impossible.

What do you do when you are in an impossible situation? What do you do when everything looks hopeless?

ACTS 12:5b

...but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

When things look hopeless it is time to pray. When the circumstances are humanly impossible, it is time to pray. There was nothing else that could be done by the church but pray, so that is what they did, day and night. When we pray we release the situation into the hands of God.

Prayer is the way the church tells God that we trust Him and depend on Him. When we pray in humility, we are depending on God and not ourselves for deliverance. When we pray for someone else it is called intercessory prayer. The church interceded for Peter without ceasing. **When we are persecuted, we must pray.**

ACTS 12:6-11

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."

Chained Hand Reminder

Cut enough 1"x8.5" strips of colored construction paper for each child to have three strips. Have each child trace one of their hands on a separate sheet of construction paper; be sure to leave enough room at the wrist of each hand for a one-inch slit. Have each child color or decorate their hands and have them write the word pray on both sides. Make paper chains with the paper strips and slip the last one through the one-inch slit on the hand sheet.

Explain that the chains represent persecution, but the hands represent prayer in the midst of persecution. Discuss that **when we are persecuted, we must pray.**

The night before his execution Peter was sound asleep. If you were going to have your head cut off the next day, how well would you sleep? Not to mention being chained between two guards with two more at the door.

The lesson we learn here from Peter is the value of the peace of God. Peter put his complete trust in God. David writes in Psalm 37:37, "Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

When you are living for God and your trust is in Him, you will have peace in the midst of the storm. Jesus was asleep in the middle of a storm and the disciples were afraid. Peter learned his lesson that day. He learned the lesson that if Jesus is in the boat of your life you can sleep peacefully, knowing that everything is in the control of God.

God sent an angel to deliver Peter. The angel had to wake Peter up by nudging him on the side. What an exciting story of rescue. Herod's plan was threatened, the Jews were denied their evil persecution of the church, and Peter was set free. **When we are persecuted, we must pray.**

Before we finish our story today, we need to pause a moment to ask an important question. Why was Peter delivered and not James? The beginning of our story told of the death of James, but God chose to deliver Peter. Did God love Peter more than James? Were the prayers of the church stronger for Peter than for James? No! The love of God is perfect. It does not vary.

God is no respecter of persons, He simply chose to have James exit this life early. He had other plans for Peter. In His sovereignty God chose that it be done this way. As a part of our prayers we should always acknowledge that God is sovereign. Peter was delivered this time, but later he was also put to death for his faith in Jesus. The peace of God was with him in both situations, because he trusted God with his life. **When we are persecuted, we must pray.**

ACTS 12:12-17

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.

Some people teach that unless your faith is perfect in prayer, you will not get an answer. Obviously the prayer team did not have perfect faith. Actually they had almost none at all. They were absolutely shocked to see Peter at their door. Their door was locked because they were afraid they, too, would be put in prison.

The only faith they had was enough to pray and ask God to help them. They did the most important thing and that was to pray to God in the midst of a seemingly impossible situation. **When we are persecuted, we must pray.**

We are assured that God hears the prayers of the Christian (Psalm 65:2). Jesus asks us to believe Him for the answer to our prayers (Matthew 21:22). It was a pleasant surprise for those in the house praying for Peter. Have you ever been surprised when God answered your prayer? **When we are persecuted, we must pray.**

In verse 17, Peter tells them to show these things to the other brethren. He wanted them to share this testimony of deliverance to others. When God answers our prayers, we should give God praise by telling others what God has done. The reason we do this is to encourage others of the goodness of God.

ACTS 12:18-19

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.

The penalty for letting someone escape while you were guarding them was death. Herod had no choice but to have them executed. What Herod and the Jews meant for evil, God used for victory. God often uses the trials and persecution in our lives to bring victory and strength to His church.

Remember the lessons:

1) Persecution:

How do we handle the impossible situations that come to our lives? We trust the Lord as Peter did and rest in the peace of God.

2) Prayer:

What should we do when we face seemingly impossible situations? We pray and believe God to hear us and deliver us. **When we are persecuted, we must pray.**

Pray

Ask each child to share a prayer request; try to take time to hear each one. Ask for volunteers to pray for that request; pray for it immediately, then go to the next request.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to pray in light of persecution. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.