

Surprised By Prayer

(Series: Reimagining Church; Message Twenty-Five)

Acts 12:1-19

A. The conversion of Cornelius had a dramatic effect on the early church

1. The church was growing rapidly; unbelievers were being converted
2. Jewish leaders are becoming increasingly concerned
 - a. Herod has James, the son of Zebedee, killed
 - b. Now Peter is arrested and imprisoned; his trial set for after Passover

B. Judaism wasn't prepared for this "attack" on their faith

1. Peter shared how he eaten with and baptized Gentles
2. The church was taking on a persona of it's own

PRISON

A. "Why weren't Christians' more intensely persecuted from the start?"

1. The answer has everything to do with Torah

"Belief in the Messiah was not the essential mark of Judaism. It was the Torah, the Law, that was the essential bond of all Jews; the Torah held them together however much they differed on other matters, including even how the Torah was to be interpreted." (Alec Vidler)

2. Initially, Christianity was considered a subset of Judaism

B. Peter violates Torah and is thrown into prison

1. Peter knows he's about to die; but it appears Peter is at peace
2. In this entire story, Peter is passive; Luke wants us to know this is God's work

C. So how does Peter get out of prison?

"In this story we do no necessarily see a miracle. It may simply be the story of a thrilling rescue" (William Barclay)

"Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shown in the cell." (Acts 12:7)

"An angel of the Lord appeared and the glory of the Lord shown around them." (Luke 2:9)

PRAYER

- A. This is intercessory prayer - i.e., they are praying about another's needs
- B. This is corporate prayer - *"many had gathered and were praying"* (12:12)

1. We hold to this heresy that prayer is primarily a private matter
2. Fervency results when we're praying together

C. The church in trouble is God's invitation for us to pray together

PETER

A. It appears the church is so engrossed they forget to give God room to answer

1. Their praying lacks expectation; they're surprised by the answer!
2. We think we need to protect God's reputation so we only pray prayers that have overwhelming odds of actually coming true

B. It appears the church is so preoccupied they don't recognize His answer

1. God often interrupts our prayer time with the answer to our prayers!
2. Sometimes the answer is there and we don't recognize it

C. It appears when the answer arrived they never enjoyed the answer

1. Luke never mentions anything about thanksgiving or praise
2. How much joy have we missed because we've failed to see God's answers?

POSTLUDE

A. This passage is designed to provide confidence and comfort to His church

"If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet, distance should make no difference. He is constantly praying for me." (Robert Murry McCheyne)

"We do not know what and how we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes on our behalf with sighs too deep for words." (Romans 8:26)

B. Luke begins Acts with the church in prayer (1:14, 24) and concludes this first "half" of Acts with a story about the church in prayer

"But the Word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24)

1. There is a direct correlation between a healthy, growing church and prayer
2. Jesus is always pursuing his mission