

# Acts 12:1-19

## Can't Stop Won't Stop

### Image Church // Study Through Acts #10

**MPT:** Herod opposes Jesus, yet is unsuccessful in his efforts as the people of God come together in prayer. Herod pays for his opposition of Jesus in his death after receiving praise in the place of God.

**MPS:** The prayers of a local church continues the mission, nothing can stop the progress of the gospel

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### Introduction

Well, welcome to Image Church! If this is your first time with us, we are so glad that you're here! If you have your Bibles go ahead and turn to Acts 12...

We've been on a journey through the book of Acts and we're going to continue that journey tonight. I hope that through our time in Acts you've been able to see how God is continuing the message and ministry of Jesus in the lives of everyday people through the power of the Holy Spirit... This should be encouraging to you because in the same way God used the church in Acts he can use us here in Atlanta!

Tonight, we are going to see one of the major catalysts that allowed the church to keep expanding!

***I don't know about you, but I've had some funny "prayer" encounters...*** like when a person prays real soft and you never hear them say "Amen" and so you keep your head bowed until someone nudges you... (I know you have experienced that)

Or the person who turns the pre-meal plan into the personal prayer time for the week...

Have you ever gone to eat with some folks you don't know that well and it comes time to pray and you bow your head and then they all begin in one voice together because they have a family prayer that that they all pray together but you had no clue?

Personally, I've found that a good way to make some extra side cash is pre-meal prayer bets... see let me let you in on a little secret, there is a 100% chance that I will be asked to pray... Apparently, people assume I am a "professional prayer" like the food will be more blessed if I do it... one of these times I am going to say "no"

Seriously though, I remember one when time I sat down with a guy and to switch it up I said: "Hey you wanna pray?" He said "Sure!"... **long pause**...then these were the words that follow: "rubba-dub-dub thanks for the grub yay God"- and he was eating before I could open my eyes!!!

- I know my face said it all...
- Some of you are like "*I am never praying in front of you because I might be a sermon example*" (your right!)

Well, tonight, we are going to be talking about prayer, and we're going to see what the church in Acts believed about Prayer and how they used it... So go ahead and look with me at **Acts 12**

### Acts 12:1-19:

**1** About that time King Herod violently attacked some who belonged to the church, **2** and he executed James, John's brother, with the sword. **3** When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter too, during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. **4** After the arrest, he put him in prison and assigned four squads of four soldiers each to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover.

At this point, the church was growing like crazy, despite of the opposition and persecution that they had received from the **religious leaders**—A new community had emerged, one where people were living differently than the rest of the world ... and it was gaining momentum!

In that, it's important to see is that ***the primary leaders in this movement are normal people everyday people***- not pro's: prophets, apostles, and pastors...

By the end of chapter 11 so much had been happening in this movement that "this new community" was labeled as "CHRISTINANS" for the very first time!

And up until now, the church hadn't faced any persecution from the government, they just kinda stayed out of it. But for whatever reason Herod got the bright idea to attack the church out of nowhere and when he does he kills James (*the first apostle to be Martyred and the 2<sup>nd</sup> recorded martyr in Acts*)...

So Herod kills James on the raid and the Jews (most likely the religious leaders) are pumped about this! And Herod seeking more favor from them arrests Peter with the intent to Kill him...

**5** So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was praying fervently to God for him.

**Fervently:** "Eagerly, earnestly, continuously..."

**6** When Herod was about to bring him out for trial, that very night Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while the sentries in front of the door guarded the prison.

Herod had to have heard about the last time Jesus-followers were put in jail, and the next day they were in the temple preaching... he wasn't playing around, he had guards stacked on deck!

**7** Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. Striking Peter on the side, he woke him up and said, "Quick, get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. [textual note: strike= "sharp blow"- Peter got smacked] **8** "Get dressed," the angel told him, "and put on your sandals." And he did. "Wrap your cloak around you," he told him, "and follow me."

**9** So he went out and followed, and he did not know that what the angel did was really happening, but he thought he was seeing a vision. **10** After they passed the first and second guards, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened to them by itself. [like the automatic doors at Walmart] They went outside and passed one street, and suddenly the angel left him.

***This scene had to have been incredible!***

**11** When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's grasp and from all that the Jewish people expected." **12** As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many had assembled and were praying.

There is a couple of things that you need to see:

In **verse 5** the text said that the "**church**" was praying—the thing to observe is **where** they're praying—they were at Mary's house... I love this because we see that the church isn't a building, event or program...

The church is a group of people committed to Jesus, and committed to each another... you see a picture of that here... and notice again that these are just normal folks that have come together in response to what's happened, not apostles!

This wasn't a church wide prayer meeting that the apostles called at a building... ***this is people committed to each other who's immediate response is coming together and praying!***

What's also important to see is that it isn't the *entire* church of Jerusalem, there's no way that they could all fit in one house... They may all have been praying but they were not all at this location.

- This is *one* of many smaller "*community groups*" that met in homes around Jerusalem that has gathered to pray for Peter!
- We know this is a common place this happens because Peter knows where to go!

And check this out, look how committed they are... it's the middle of the night and *verse 12* tells us that they "*were praying*" that's present tense... meaning that they were still praying for Peter!!

*Let's keep reading:*

**13** [Peter] knocked at the door of the outer gate, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer. **14** She recognized Peter's voice, and because of her joy, she did not open the gate but ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the outer gate.

Rhoda (I like to call her Ronda) just left him there... I can see Peter like *deep breath- ALLLL THIS, and I can't even get let in the gate... I'm out in the middle of the road after escaping from jail...*

So, Ronda, runs in and tells the crew Peter is here:

**15** "You're out of your mind!" they told her. But she kept insisting that it was true, and they said, "It's his angel." **16** Peter, however, kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were amazed.

**17** Motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. "Tell these things to James and the brothers," he said, and he left and went to another place. **18** At daylight, there was a great commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. **19** After Herod had searched and did not find him, he interrogated the guards and ordered their execution. Then Herod went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

Alright, let's take a look at how the church in Acts treated prayer and what they believed about it:

### **1. Prayer was a war-time walkie-talkie**

**John Piper says:** "*Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den...Until you know that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for: Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission.*" - John Piper, *Desiring God*

Let me show you this played out in the Church here in Acts:

- At the very beginning of **Acts 1:14** when Jesus had ascended into heaven they were in continual prayer together...
- **Acts 1:24** they had a big decision, who would take the place of Judas as the 12th apostle, what did they do? Prayed...
- **Acts 2:42** they were devoted to prayer together...
- **Acts 4:23-31** prayed for boldness and endurance to continue the message and ministry of Jesus after they had faced opposition.
- At the end of **Acts 7** Stephen's last words are a prayer before he is stoned to death... (literally almost like one final radio in to God as bombs were dropping around him)
- **Acts 9:40** A girl named Dorcas had died, Peter prays for God to raise her from the dead and God does...
- **Acts 10:9** Peter goes up to the roof to pray as the church is continuing to expand...

So, when it came to this situation with Peter, they rent right back to the radio!!! This event that we're reading about tonight is nothing more than a classical summary of what they always do, they pray!

**Example:**

Think about this for a minuet... if you were to take the army and deploy them on a serious mission over in, let's say Afghanistan. But you said, here's the deal guys you have no radios, no form of communication to each other or to headquarters... how well do you think the mission would go?

- It would be impossible to pull it off... they would be all over the place trying to make it happen... they would be scared to death... and most likely killed...
- See, there's a confidence in the ability to be able to communicate with one another when you're on a mission like that... communication is the core of carrying out the mission...

***If that's the case, how much more confidence should we then have knowing that God's on the other side of our communication?!?***

The church in Acts had confidence in *who* they were communicating with, and they knew that the only way that they were going to continue the mission that Jesus had sent them on—to *take the gospel to the nations*—was by being in constant communication with God!!

I have said this before, ***when you become a Christian, you simultaneously become part of a mission, the mission to share about the very message you have received...***

The church here in Acts understood that, which is why almost every one of their prayers was directly related to the mission of furthering the message of the gospel... Prayer was a war-time walkie-talkie for them, not domestic intercom!

They were facing opposition to the mission in James being Killed and Peter being arrested... they realized that *"life was a war"* ... and they responded by going to their knees.

Let me ask you this: Do you realize that life's a war, and that the world is standing in opposition to the gospel?? Does that reality shape our prayer life??

***For many of us we're wasting time on the intercom when we need to be on the walkie-talkie!***

We need to constantly be going hard on our knees asking for God to move the gospel forward into the hearts and lives of people!

See God has given us prayer as a way of declaring that we can't but God can... it shapes our mind around dependence on Him!

- A Pastor, and mentor or mine says: ***Prayer moves the arm that moves the world!***<sup>1</sup>

**Apply:** Are you leveraging that? Is prayer an intercom of convenience or a war time walkie-talkie? Are you praying for things that will advance the gospel? Are you praying for our church? Are you praying for our city? Are you praying for lost people??

For some of you, you don't know how to be part of the mission, you don't know how you should take a next step, you feel frozen and it's because you're not in communication with God... Ask he to lead you and show you!

*Let's look at the second thing that we see from the church is Acts:*

**2. They prayed with persistence**

**Verse 5** tells us that they were praying fervently. Literally: Eagerly, earnestly, continuously... and then in **verse 12** when Peter shows up in the middle of the night ***they were still praying!***

You know why they did that? You know how they knew to do it? Jesus had taught them...

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<sup>1</sup> Pastor JD Greear: Sermon. *SENT*; Acts #16

**In Luke 18:1-5** Jesus tells his followers a parable about a persistent widow... let me read it to you:

**1** Now he told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not give up. **2** "There was a judge in a certain town who didn't fear God or respect people. **3** And a widow in that town kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' **4** "For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or respect people, **5** yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will give her justice, so that she doesn't wear me out by her persistent coming.'"

Jesus is making a point through *contrast*, not *comparison*... let me show you what I mean...

- The Judge is obviously not a great guy- Jesus says 2 times that the Judge doesn't fear God or respect people...
- The widow comes to the Judge as a stranger, alone, with no husband to advocate for her (which is how it would have worked back then)

And yet, this evil Judge grants this woman who is a stranger, alone with no advocate her wishes because she continued to come to him.

**The point is this:** if an evil judge is moved by the petitions of a stranger, how much more will God help his children when they cry out to Him persistently?!

***Do you believe that?*** Listen, things may not always turn out how you want them too, but God will look out for His Children for all of eternity!!

- Some of you need to find hope in that tonight... That God hears you and he will deliver you... maybe not on this side of Heaven, but what awaits those in Christ is far greater than freedom from the things of today!

See, God is the exact opposite of the unjust evil Judge...

And for those that have trusted in Jesus, you are not like the widow...

- She came alone with no advocate pleading her own case, but Jesus is the advocate who pleaded for your case! Through Jesus you have been adopted as sons and daughters of God!

And then at the end of **verse 8** in this parable we see this:

**Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"**

***What does that mean??*** We said earlier that prayer is a declaration that we can't but that God can... Jesus is driving this home by saying that the point of being persistent in prayer is us having continual faith in God!

- The goal isn't just simply trying to wear down God, the goal is continual faith in God!

**One Pastor says it like this:** *Prayer and faith stand and fall together. Faith is the furnace of our lives. Its fuel is the grace of God. And the divinely appointed shovel for feeding the burner is prayer.*<sup>2</sup>

The church in Acts was living this out! They didn't know what was going to happen with Peter, but what they did know is that they needed to be praying, persistently...

- They needed to set their faith of God, and trust that he is faithful and he is in control!

But so many times we run right past this... We might petition God with our mouth but we aren't really trusting Him with our heart!

God gave us prayer as a reminder of our dependence on him! When you pray focus your heart on trusting that God is in control! Your prayer is a declaration of that! "I can't, YOU can!"

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper: Sermon. Always pray and do not lose heart. Jan 9, 1983

You want to increase your faith in God? Be in consistent, persistent prayer, I promise it will shape your heart.

**Example:** Garrett- the more I petitioned God the more I realized he was the one that had to do it! God shaped my heart during that time that increased my dependence on Him!

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> thing that we see from the Church in Acts is that:*

### **3. They recognized the power of Prayer**

The Church was able to use prayer like a war-time walkie-talkie, and they were able to pray persistently because they understood the power of prayer!

You know what's interesting in all this? The ones who you think would have all the power don't, and the ones that you think don't have power do...

- Herod- powerful ruler
- Peter- in prison
- Herod- had an army at his command
- The church didn't have an army

But what the church had was Prayer- they believed in it, they valued it and they trusted in it... for them Prayer wasn't a last resort it was a first response... They really believed God was listening and that He would act...

Is that true for you? Do you believe in the power of prayer? Is it your first response or is it more of a last resort for you?

- Is prayer more of a formality for you or is it something you rely on?

See the church in Acts knew the power of prayer because they constantly remembered what had been done for them through Jesus!

They remembered the gospel... see, Peter was in chains awaiting his judgement, but at just the right time he was freed, not by his own ability but through an act of God...

In the same way, you and I are in chains slaves to sin awaiting the judgment of God for what we have done- the crimes against Him that we have committed, but at just the right time and act of God gave us the ability to be free from our chains...

God sent Jesus, but instead of walking us out of prison he took our place, and he was judged on our behalf and though he was innocent he took on the sin of the guilty, and Jesus, the perfect Son of God was executed in the place of you and me...

But just as Scripture said it would happen, he raises from the dead- offering us new life in him...

- Have you trusted in God offers you through Christ?? Have you surrender to Jesus??

Jesus is the means of salvation for those who believe! Have you believed in that?

You will never understand the power of prayer unless you've believed in the power that saved you...

Want to increase your prayer life? ***Your consistency in prayer will be determined by your dependence on God!***

Here's the thing though, your dependence on God is fueled by remembering the gospel!

## Conclusion:

Do you realize these things? How is your prayer life? What if we petitioned God for our city like they petitioned God for Peter?

Samuel Chadwick (in *The Path of Prayer*) says:

“The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from prayer. Our enemy fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray. Prayer turns ordinary mortals into men of power. It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God. There is no power like that of prevailing prayer.”

Look at how it all ends: Herod opposes Jesus, yet is unsuccessful in his efforts as the people of God come together in prayer. Herod pays for his opposition of Jesus in his death after receiving praise in the place of God.

**22** The assembled people began to shout, “It’s the voice of a god and not of a man!” **23** At once an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give the glory to God, and he was eaten by worms and died. **24** But the word of God flourished and multiplied. **25** After they had completed their relief mission, Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem, taking along John who was called Mark.

Herod’s dependence was on man- the churches was on God... God wins...

There are many in our city like Herod who are dependent on man... and what they can do in their power... they will be judged... we need to feel the weight of that... are we paying for God to save them, for God to use this church?

Are we leveraging prayer as a war-time walki-talkie or is it a domestic intercom? Are we consistently setting our faith on Him, asking Him to move in this city??

What if God answered all your prayers? How many people would be saved??

Listen, Every major awakening has always been preceded by prayer

I want to close with this:

**Samuel Zwemer:** “The history of missions is the history of answered prayer... I am convinced that when we stand before God...we will discover that every soul ever brought to a knowledge of Christ was in some way related to intercessory prayer.” (Dick Eastman)

Let me pray for us...